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59th year of publication

Africa between rock stars and politicians

Harry der Nederlanden

It was supposed to be about Africa – about Africa's impoverished people, suffering from hunger, AIDS, malaria and unemployment – but what we saw on television and read in the newspapers was rock stars, demonstrators raising havoc and then the terrorist attacks on London commuters. One day the television news was showing a young demonstrator who had done his utmost to get bloodied by trying to get past the cops guarding Gleneagles, the meeting place for the G-8 leaders, and the next it was showing footage of hundreds bloodied by explosions in the London subway. All in all it was enough to make you wonder whether the world has gone mad.

Bob Geldoff rallied dozens of rock stars to stage huge rock concerts in ten different locations during the week before the G-8 conference to mobilize. Tens of thousands of young people in Canada joined hundreds of thousands of other young people around the globe connected by satellite and jumbo screens to listen to a day of loud pop music interspersed with homilies about the crisis in Africa. The Live 8 concerts were not about raising donations for the poor in Africa, however. Admission was free – if you could get a ticket. Emphasis was put on pressuring G-8 leaders to direct a larger part of their budgets to African aid.

At the last such concert held for Africa, the Live Aid concert held 20 years ago, several millions were raised. Why the change in strategy? Perhaps because those millions quickly vanished into



Paul Martin arrives at Gleneagles

Africa along with the billions in aid spent every year without making any perceptible lasting change in the lives of ordinary Africans?

Various organizations that have long been working to alleviate suffering in Africa were present at the different venues, but understandably they received considerably less attention than the rock stars. The focus was not on the work of the hundreds of non-governmental agencies and churches that have been doing the most effective work in Africa, but on shaking loose the big bucks from the government coffers and on debt cancellation.

No modest aims this time. Nothing less than the complete elimination of poverty in Africa was the goal of the Live 8 concerts. Rock stars got up in front of the millions of screaming fans to recite some of the horrible statistics. Some accurate, some not. So many die of hunger every minute. So many die of AIDS. So many die of malaria. So many orphans.

Along with Bono and Paul McCartney from the UK and Will Smith from Philadelphia, the star-struck fans also heard a speech by Nelson Mandela from

South Africa. He was featured in the headlines of papers around the

world which declared that Mandela was the star of the show. But none carried more than a couple of lines from his speech.

"Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great," he said. "You can be that generation."

Mandela referred to the poverty and starvation in Africa as genocide. There is a genocide going on in Africa. In the Sudan. It takes people with murderous intentions to wipe out others from the face of the earth for a genocide to take place. Mandela also declared that as long as poverty exists there is no freedom. So will massive redistribution of income and huge infusions of aid bring

freedom? No matter. Such happenings seem to bring out overblown rhetoric. Africa does need aid badly – a great deal of it – and soon. A great deal, however, depends on how it is given and administered. One thing is sure: we will not make poverty history this year or next year. Live 8 is already history, already the television cameras have shifted to the victims of terrorism in London, already the experts are talking about the need for increased expenditures on security. Soon many of the rock stars will also be history. But the poor? They will undoubtedly still See Stars and politicians p. 2...

The great African aid debate

Harry der Nederlanden

It makes for high drama, of course, to set the scene in terms of stingy capitalist G-8 leaders out to exploit Africa versus the champions of the little people pressuring them to increase aid. But long before the G-8 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland, most of the leaders had already made commitments to debt cancellation and more aid for Africa, particularly to fight disease and provide food. Those demonstrators running up against a cordon of helmeted policemen with plastic shields had little or no effect on the proceedings within, other than to increase the cost of security.

Well before Live 8, the G-8 summit was declared to be Africa's hope for a future. "Africa in the balance," trumpeted one headline, arguing that this is a watershed moment in which the future of an entire continent hangs in the balance. Even the theme repeated again and again by church leaders



Gleneagles, Scotland

as well as rock stars – "Make poverty history" – implies that the rich north can by a single decision made by eight world leaders (actually seven – Russia is hurting) eradicate poverty and sickness in all of Africa.

At the same time, in the week

leading up to the summit, almost every newspaper published opinion pieces by those who question whether aid does much to relieve poverty. Some, in fact, argue that it has done the opposite – that periodic infusions of aid

Continued on p. 2...

News



Bush arrives at Gleneagles

have damaged the economies of some of the countries they were supposed to help. They argue that aid has done little to help economic growth and that this is the only thing that pulls people out of poverty – not handouts.

But why would anyone raise objections to increased aid for a continent that is so obviously hurting?

Quite a number of analysts, like Aurel Braun, a political science prof at the U of Toronto, said they'd be in favor of aid if there was any sort of proof that it actually helps pull Africans out of poverty. He complained about the Make Poverty History campaign that it is simply easier to make world leaders look bad and feel guilty rather than tackle the real causes of poverty – corruption, bad government, dictatorship.

Several newspapers quoted George Ayittey, an African intellectual who calls many African states "vampire states" because their governments are no better than gangsters: they have long ripped off aid to enrich themselves and their cronies and used the money to increase their power. The way to riches in Africa is politics, he says, which makes the competition for government positions fierce. And power once gained is not willingly relinquished.

Ayittey quotes statistics that suggest that between 1960 and 1997 Africa has received the equivalent of six Marshall Plans for development assistance. In 1991 alone the ruling elite of Africa siphoned off more than \$200 billion for themselves – amounting to more than half the foreign debt. Today, he says, most Africans are

worse off than they were at independence.

Peter Goodspeed, writing in the *National Post*, says that by the African Union's estimate as much as \$148 billion is lost per year to corruption. He argues that "it is corruption that has hurt the poor the most, diverting funds from development, undermining governments, fueling injustice and inequality, discouraging foreign investment, and breeding cynicism and violence."

Finding examples of waste on a huge scale in Africa is very easy. There's a long list of corrupt leaders vying for prominence. "Almost anywhere you look in Africa you find rulers enriching themselves at the public expense," says Goodspeed.

One of those he mentions is the king of Swaziland. He spent over \$1 million on a lavish birthday party and \$14.6 million to build palaces for his 11 wives and to buy each of them a new BMW. He is also building a \$100 million airport in the jungle. Mercedes-Benz and BMW have long done good business in Africa.

Both Kenya and Zimbabwe were at one time prospering countries in which people were being lifted out of poverty and hunger. In both it was corruption and bad government that brought decay and impoverishment.

In short, as the Associated Press put it, "Africa is filled with good intentions that ended badly."

However, supporters of aid are quick to point out that the corruption is not just on the part of African leaders. Western corporations have often been corrupters. Moreover, the history of past aid transpired under Cold war conditions, when it was enough for some petty tyrant to declare himself on the side of the U.S. or the U.S.S.R. to elicit large amounts of aid, most of which was used to keep the recipient in power in lavish style.

So the critics of simplistic appeals to "make poverty history" by simply canceling debts across the board and doubling the amount of government-to-government aid have no trouble making their case that a great deal – perhaps half – of it has not only been wasted but has corrupted the leadership and rendered the economy of some

countries aid-dependent.

But, counters Dave Toyce, CEO of World Vision Canada, the idea that African nations are poor mainly because of corruption is no less simplistic. First of all, it is simplistic to talk of Africa as if all African countries are the same. Many are poor because they don't have the funds to create an environment for development. They don't have good roads, lack energy sources, are geographically isolated and are plagued with diseases and natural disasters like drought.

He cites a number of examples in which foreign aid and debt cancellation have made a huge difference to the people. Tanzania has used the monies that once went to paying off debts to greatly improve public education. It hopes to achieve free universal primary school education by 2006.

Ghana, too, used debt relief to build hundreds of new schools, to provide micro-credit to farmers and to improve sanitation.

Toyce defends Jeffrey Sachs, the author of *The End of Poverty*, who has been a strong pusher for increased aid to Africa. But in an Op Ed in the *New York Times*, David Brooks points out that Sachs' confidence about our ability to refashion the world to conform to our reason and to our ideals comes straight out of his Enlightenment faith.

In his book, Sachs focuses not on people, but on large structures and resources, tracing Africa's poverty not to human failures like corruption, greed, governance, civil wars, tribalism and so on, but to lack of material resources, technology, bad geography and long-term poverty. Sachs has been instrumental in convincing Blair that one big push – a huge infusion of capital – will break Africa out of the poverty trap. He believes this despite the fact that trillions in aid and social engineering have failed.

Brooks, himself a conservative, points out that conservatives tend to emphasize the role of culture in the affairs of nations – ideas, religion, moral standards, personal initiative, democratic government. "Conservatives appreciate the crooked lumber of humanity," he writes – "that human beings are not simply organisms within systems but have minds and inclinations of their own that usually defy planners."

But very few supporters of increased aid, certainly not Toyce and Sachs, are so naive as to suggest aid monies simply be tossed around without controls and without strings attached. In recent decades much more sophisticated ways have been developed for dispensing aid. And just dealing with diseases like AIDS and malaria and the costs associated with the loss of parents and teachers exceeds the ability of most African countries to cope.

Toyce is representative: he also stresses the importance of linking aid to the strengthening of such institutions as the judiciary, law enforcement and the civil service. Foreign aid must not serve to displace or subvert indigenous institutions. Camilla Toulmin, director of International Institute

for Environment and Development, argues that a large proportion of aid should by-pass governments and go directly to non-governmental agencies. In certain countries one of the best ways to dispense aid, many have pointed out, is through the churches. Jonathan Kay, in the *National Post*, cites a study by the International Monetary Fund that finds that government to government aid has made almost no difference in the health of the peoples who received it. Aid that was delivered through non-governmental agencies at the grassroots level, however, was effective in setting up local clinics and schools, providing training, funding agricultural projects and investing in very small businesses (micro-credit).

Stars and politicians ... continued from p.1

Bono and Martin
be with us.

The politicians have been happy to pose with Bono and Geldof and other rock stars. But Britain had already announced its so-called Marshall Plan for Africa well before the Live 8 concert. Bush had long ago tripled aid to Africa and increased the monies dedicated to fighting malaria, which is almost as big a killer andcrippler as AIDS.

As to debt cancellation, that too was already in the works – to the tune of some 40 billion to the poorest countries in Africa. No doubt some of the demonstrators considered this a pittance because they only think in absolute terms.

With added stresses to their resources and increasing unemployment, the other G-8 countries will do well to maintain their present commitment to 0.7 percent of their GDP. Russia, also part of the G-8, is itself in need of aid.

Paul Martin had already pledged to double foreign aid by 2010 over 2003 levels to about \$5-billion as well as to double aid to Africa

by 2008 over 2001 levels to \$2 billion. To increase aid to 0.7 percent of our GDP would cost up to \$41 billion over the next 10 years – almost as great an increase as that planned for health-care and equalization payments.

Still, many thought it was a

good concert. It was free. Perhaps it really did make some fans more aware of Africa's needs. It certainly helped the reputations of some of the rock stars. But it probably won't put much of a dent in Africa's poverty or help solve any of its deep problems.

What did it contribute to an understanding of politics and economics of global poverty? If it left the impression (as it seemed to do) that all that needs to be done to solve Africa's woes is for the rich countries to pour more aid into that continent, said Live 8 critics like George Ayittey of the Free Africa Foundation, then it did more harm than good.

Said Ayittey on *Newshour*, "It is noble for the rich countries to help Africa, but then the question is: What are 'African leaders themselves doing to help their own people?"

Smart aid is what will empower the African people to instigate reform from within. The United States and rich countries cannot change Africa from within."

Politics

How much fat is in extra lean ground beef?

Maynard van der Gallen

How much fat is in extra lean ground beef? I quizzed 10 people the other day and they all said they had never thought about that. The answers I got were from 0 to 37 per cent. One person said it doesn't have enough fat in to cook properly – it's too dry. How much fat would lean ground beef have? What about medium and regular?

Hamburger or ground beef is unquestionably a staple in the Canadian diet. According to reports from the Beef Information Centre (BIC), 50 per cent of all beef bought in Canada is ground beef, making it the most popular meat in the country.

One reason for this popularity is that the hamburger – more commonly known simply as "the burger" – is the mainstay of fast food chain restaurants. In addition, ground beef is one of the cheaper meats in today's markets. And it should be because cull cows are still bringing 15 to 25 cents a pound less than they did three years ago. I should know – I sold three good cull beef cows last week. They brought 27, 30 and 34.5 cents a pound. The cheque after expenses was for \$876.03.

We can use ground beef in many of our favorite dishes – chili, meatloaf, lasagna, cabbage rolls, meatballs, and of course, the burger.

Want to make something really tasty and different from the old flat burger? My favorite is making little round meatballs the size of an egg. You can fry them, but the best tasting ones are hot right off the grill. You'll need a grill with the bars close together or they'll fall through. Just roll them around until they're done.

I made a few pounds of the tasty meatballs last summer at our local Foodgrains Bank get-together (for volunteers) at our cottage. I barbecued them over hot hardwood coals. There was plenty of food and food left over, but the little meatballs were gone in no time. I should add that I don't have a gas barbecue. Never had one. I only barbecue at the cottage and it's always over hot hardwood coals. Why hardwood coals? You get the tastiest meat. No comparison.

With increased awareness in recent years of what a healthy diet should look like, some people question the validity of having ground

beef on a wholesome eating plan because of the fat content.

BIC says if you follow a few guidelines, it can be eaten as often as you like. This is because the federal government regulation dictates the maximum amount of fat that can be ground into hamburger (as well, it ensures the meat is packaged well and kept chilled until purchased).

In Canada, consumers can purchase four grades of ground beef: extra lean, lean, medium and regular.

BIC says extra lean may contain 10 per cent fat; lean up to 17 per cent; medium up to 23 per cent; regular up to 30 per cent fat.

Now don't quit eating ground beef because those figures shock you. The good thing to remember is that even if you buy medium or regular, much of the fat can be cooked out and discarded, so you are not necessarily eating a high-fat product.

There will be shrinkage as the fat runs off so in the long run, you may not be spending much more if you buy extra lean or lean says the BIC.

Extra lean is usually the most expensive per pound, while regular is the least costly.

Some people find the extra lean ground beef too dry so they mix in some regular meat, which seems to be the perfect blend for many dishes.

Fewer people make a meal from scratch

While we're on the subject of food, here are some interesting food statistics from the polling firm Ipsos-Reid. It's from 2003 so the figures may have changed somewhat.

The number of consumers who make a meal from scratch everyday is down to 27 per cent. Half of Canadians now hold the food industry, not individual consumers who choose foods, responsible for the number of products sold that are high in fat and lead to obesity. Almost half (48 per cent) believe in taxing high fat foods while 39 per cent believe in financial incentives for those who choose healthy meals.



Maynard van der Gallen is a farmer and owns and operates The Old Towne Hall Restaurant and Tea Room in Renfrew, Ont. Chicken breasts

Divorce at last?
A change of heart

Back in 1997 I was invited to contribute a chapter to the 3rd edition of Mark Charlton and Paul Barker's edited volume, *Crosscurrents: Contemporary Political Issues*, published by ITP Nelson. I was asked to respond to an essay by David Bercuson, "Why Canada and Quebec Must Part," originally published in the March 1995 issue of *Current History*. My contribution was titled, "Why Political Divorce Must Be Averted," and it was placed in the volume right after Bercuson's. I marshalled several arguments against Quebec separation, drawing on the divorce metaphor to note that there are always casualties in a marital breakup. I pointed to the difficulties of historic instances of secession and partition, with the obligatory allusion to Cyprus, where I have paternal roots and whose experience has made me averse to separatist movements in general. I was especially proud of this essay, because I felt I had done my part for the cause of Canadian unity.

When the 4th edition of *Crosscurrents* was being prepared a few years later, I was not asked to revise my contribution. Both Bercuson's and my essays were to be dropped, because the editors judged that separatism was no longer in the forefront of public consciousness. The Supreme Court's 1998 Quebec reference, the Chrétien government's Clarity Act and the subsequent return to power of the provincial Liberals in Quebec City had effectively sidelined the festering issue of separation.

Now this has changed once more. The latest public opinion polls indicate that a majority in Quebec favor sovereignty. The Sponsorship Scandal, which has discredited the federal Liberal Party in Quebec, has also damaged the federalist cause in general in that province.

If the editors put out a 5th edition of the *Crosscurrents* volume, they may have to revisit the separatist issue and reincorporate essays taking opposite positions on national unity. However, if they invite me to revise my old essay, I may have to decline. Why? Recently I have come to wonder whether Bercuson was not right after all. I still dislike partitions and separations as a gen-

Principalities
& Powers

David T. Koyzis

eral rule. They cause huge problems for everyone involved.

However, thinking as a Christian who strongly believes in the public witness of the Christian faith, I am now beginning to wonder whether the presence within Canada of a radically secularized Québec might not constitute a nearly insuperable obstacle to the progress of such a witness. Once an overwhelmingly Catholic province, this changed after 1960 as a result of the Révolution tranquille, or Quiet Revolution, which transformed the province virtually overnight: quickly emptying the pews, severely depressing its once high birthrate, ending the church's hold on much of the province's life and fanning the flames of nationalism. Since then Canadians as a whole have been governed the vast majority of time by heirs of the Quiet Revolution who have managed to put their stamp on the culture as a whole. Given that Québec has the second-highest population in Canada, the province has considerable clout at the federal level.

Until recently I have thought it best to accommodate Québec to the extent possible within the current framework of confederation. It is with some sadness that I am coming to conclude that this may not be in the longterm best interest either of Québec itself or of the remainder of the country. If the latter is to have some chance of casting off the stranglehold of official secularism and embracing something like a principled pluralism, then it may have to find its way without la belle province.

David T. Koyzis considers this, not a position paper, but a trial balloon. As such he earnestly hopes readers will be able to show him why he is wrong in all this.

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Editorial

In the comparative mode

Harry der Nederlanden

Many of Shakespeare's plays pivot on the theme of seeing, watching someone else closely. In an earlier editorial I alluded to *Othello*. In that play Iago is constantly telling his noble master to look, slowly poisoning his mind with suspicions about the woman he loves. That's how the hermeneutics of suspicion can effect our view of the world as well. After a while all we see is malice and evil.

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare used one of the most famous stories in Western literature, the story of Troy. It's a story that has spoken to almost every generation of school children for hundreds of years. In it two of the most popular subjects of storytelling are brought together – love and war.

It's not just television and movies that bring us questionable stories. Those stories have also been told and retold in school – stories about heroism gained through killing someone else in battle, stories about women who sigh after such heroes, for they embody the very epitome of manliness.

Troilus and Cressida popped into my mind when I was translating the latest reflections by Van Ruler on the book of Ecclesiastes. Van Ruler links watching and envy. When we look at others, we can't resist comparing ourselves to them – and envying them.

In Shakespeare's play, the character who is constantly telling the title characters – Troilus and Cressida – to look and compare is Pandarus (the origin of the verb "to pander"). Pandarus praises Cressida's beauty to Troilus, comparing her favorably to Helen of Troy (the face that launched a thousand ships).

Shortly thereafter, Troilus is overheard musing to himself that Helen is praised for her beauty simply because both sides have puffed her up to this stature to make her worth fighting over. Her beauty he says has been painted in blood.

Later Pandarus is standing beside Cressida as the warriors of Troy file by and the women on the wall cast an admiring eye on their heroes. He picks out the great Hector and compares Troilus to him to convince Cressida that Troilus is the better man.

Pandarus: "Mark him, note him.... Look well upon him, niece. Look you how his sword is bloodied...."

Cressida gives Pandarus an argument, teasing him, and he

expostulates with her: "...have you any eyes, do you know what a man is? Is not birth, beauty, good shape, discourse, manhood, learning, gentleness, virtue, youth, liberality, and such like, the spice and salt that season a man?"

Cressida has a droll reply: "Ay, a minced man."

It's a wonderful pun that mocks the idea that the ideal man can be assembled as it were from a box of prefabricated qualities like a Lego toy. Such a person, suggests Cressida, would be nothing but a hodge-podge of ingredients, a phony creature without integrity and without a core character.

I'm reminded of some of the reality shows in which someone sorts through a stable of candidates to discover which one comes closest to his or her ideal. But it also works as a parody of Greek realism: how else do you ascend to the highest ideal of manhood except by comparison. Virtue by virtue, trait by trait the onlooker or lover climbs the ladder of being to the highest exemplar of human beauty and virtue.

This process of picking out qualities to assemble the ideal man had already been subverted earlier in the play: when Cressida's aide picks out Ajax as the very image of a hero, he puts him together with traits drawn from animals. The result resembles those composite beasts school children create by using parts from different animals.

Whether in the realm of love or war, it is all about looking and comparing. The lover seeks the very pinnacle and sum of grace and beauty and the soldiers in both camps seek the warrior who best represents those qualities that they value most. On both levels the quest is for the real thing, for that which is true and authentic. But in the social drama played out among the characters, the only way to discern what is most excellent is by comparing the traits of characters.

Some of this happens on the level of broad and sometimes crude humor, but it is a serious business. In the course of the play several high-sounding philosophical speeches are made that further develop the quandary in which human beings find themselves as they pursue this quest for what is of highest value and for what is permanent and enduring.

One speaker argues that this is what the hardships, suffering, trials and combat of history are all about. History is a winnowing process to separate the wheat from the chaff, the weighty and substantial from that which is light and fleeting. In another speech, the metaphors are taken from alchemy: whether in love or war, what is happening is a process of purification, and in the end what is pure and unmixed comes to the top. There are some echoes here of biblical figures of speech.

Troilus and Cressida, however, shows the entire process to be a violent and in the end destructive one. As the characters look and compare, weighing and measuring one another and themselves in comparison to some model, imitation takes on a very sinister aspect. The word "emulation" occurs several times in the play. This is one of the central themes of the play.

To emulate someone means to imitate him in order to equal or to excel that model. We see the person who is most valued and recognized by society and we want to be like him; in fact, we want to take his place. In order to displace him, we must be even better.

This sort of quest for excellence, then, turns us all into rivals. In order to be recognized as the best, as the model to which everyone points as the one to imitate, we must usurp the place of the previous hero.

The most extreme form of emulation occurs on the battlefield as the select heroes of the Trojan and the Greek camps face one another. The greater the virtues of the opponent, the greater the glory and fame that will accrue to the victor. A similar drama is played out in many westerns.

The ageing gunman who has gained fame by shooting it out with many other desperadoes is called out by the young gunfighter eager to make a name for himself.

But it's not just on the level of war or sports that the logic of looking, comparing and envying occurs. Pandarus is in many ways an image of the playwright, of Shakespeare himself. The playwright – or the novelist or filmmaker – is in the business of making us see certain characters (heroes and heroines) who exemplify certain virtues, either positively or negatively. We recognize certain qualities as worthwhile largely because they are the virtues others around us value, often by telling stories. The playwright or writer, thus, mediates or mirrors the way society sees persons and events. We see and judge through the eyes of others; we do so not as isolated individuals who make objective judgments, but we internalize the standards of others.

In a very real sense, we are all composite persons. What we single out for praise and admiration is dictated not just by the society around us, but those who have preceded us are also part of this great admiration society. Among them the Greeks and Shakespeare. They have contributed to our idea of what constitutes an admirable human being worth imitating. They, therefore, are panderers too, drawing us into this vicious world of rivalry in pursuit of the ideal.

Preachers, too, like to hold up models for us to imitate. And again we are drawn into the endless, restless quest to appropriate excellence, virtue, piety. It's a war of all against all in which the best are envied and emulated – and ultimately devoured in the process.

In a profound sense, language itself stands accused. One of the first figures of speech that we learn is the simile. It is a comparison. Language itself draws us into the game of comparing: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate...." And away the lover goes. The more extravagant his similes and comparisons, the further he finds himself straying from the flawed and finite person he is seeking to admire and to elevate.

But the Bible, too, begins with a simile, a comparison. Man is made in the image of God, in his likeness. And the Bible teaches us to love like God and to do justice like God.

Troilus and Cressida paints a vivid picture of what society and culture devolves into when we seek to be like God in the wrong way. We take on ourselves the responsibility of creating the world from scratch, of being world makers, of creating and preserving the values that make life civilized and good. Modern man, thinkers from Hegel to Sartre to Fukuyama have said, has taken on the ambition to be god.

We see this impulse in the Project for the New American Century and Bush's grand plan to transform the Middle East. But we also see it in Eurotopia and in the Make Poverty History campaign. It's an endless, stressful, strenuous and destructive chasing after wind, says the Preacher.

Jesus Christ is the incarnation of likeness. He is like God and like us – more than that: he is both God and man. To teach us how to be, he points to the flowers of the field, which in their beauty simply are what they are. They are the very image of faith as trust – the affirmation of what God declares to be good.

At the beginning and end of the Christian life, there is trust and rest. We don't have to lay the foundations of history and create the norms and values; they are a gift of the Creator. And we cannot, however much we strive and exert ourselves, make the world new, not even beginning with ourselves. We have to begin by resting, taking a sabbath, in him.

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Opinion

Multi-faith: the beginning of intolerant tolerance?

Andre Basson

"Paris is worth a mass," the Protestant, Henry IV, is supposed to have said when he became king of France and converted to Catholicism. According to the history books, Henry's conversion was not a matter of religious principle but rather of political expedience. He did so to appease the powerful Catholic league opposed his accession to the throne and to prevent religious conflict in the realm.

With the increasing religious diversity that characterizes North American society these days, Henry's choice – between Protestant and Catholic – seems almost ridiculously simple. With so many religions sharing the same space in our modern society is it possible to meet all their demands for equal treatment and respect?

Finding an equitable *modus vivendi* that would satisfy the interests of every religion is an issue that especially universities are struggling to resolve. Not too long ago, it was still widely believed that there was no place for religious expression in academic institutions. Faith was seen as something profoundly personal and incompatible with scientific enquiry.

Furthermore, the view – especially popular in many academic circles – that religion's days are numbered and that it will soon disappear completely, has been disproved by recent events, both in North America and elsewhere. There is clear evidence of an increasing interest in religion that seems to cut across all age groups and social levels. Proof of the interest in Christianity has been the slew of very popular books and movies dealing in most cases with some highly controversial issues. The most well-known examples are probably the Mel Gibson movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*.

In Canada, this rising interest in religion has not gone unnoticed by some university administrators. In some cases, religious expression is no longer merely tolerated as something quite foreign to the academe or as pertaining exclusively to one's private life, but actually even considered as an important part of the university experience. One visible sign of this important trend has been the establishment of so-called multi-faith centres where students of different faiths are encouraged to meet and discuss spiritual issues. Brock University in St. Catharines inaugurated its multi-faith centre last fall.

But how can one accommodate the various faiths and belief systems represented on campus in a manner that will be fair to all of them? For example, if Muslim students are granted a prayer-room with ablution facilities, should one extend a similar privilege to every faith group that demands it, lack of space (an endemic problem on campuses) notwithstanding?

To avoid the problem of conflicting religious interests, the French, for example, have long maintained that all their educational establishments should be completely religion-free. This is the only way, so they believe, in which all religions can be guaranteed equal rights. But as the controversy surrounding the wearing of the Muslim headscarf (the foulard) has amply demonstrated, the model is showing signs of breaking down.

Underlying the multi-faith approach to religious diversity on Canadian campuses is the principle that all religions are equally valid or true. Given the wide variety of religions and belief systems represented in universities in Canada these days, it's difficult to see what other view is available to university administrators that would not

open them to the accusation of favoring a particular religion or belief system.

But for many Christians, the matter is far from clear cut. For example, how can one proclaim the gospel of Christ who referred to himself as the "way, the truth, and the life" in an environment in which other faiths make similar claims regarding the truth?

On the university campus, there are two situations in particular in which the multi-faith model proves to be particularly vexing for the Christian. The one arises when the Christian campus minister is invited to say a prayer at the convocation ceremonies or say grace at official university banquets. The other situation that has proved to be problematic in the past has to do with interfaith services on campus, usually in the wake of a national tragedy or disaster. This was the case after September 11.

In both situations, the risk of giving offence is high. An approach that refuses to make any accommodation whatsoever will offend some, while an approach that does make at least some accommodation will offend others. There is no doubt that the multi-faith mood currently prevailing on North American university campuses will continue to insist that the different faiths make whatever accommodations are necessary to avoid conflict.

But what if these accommodations affect or even neutralize some of the basic tenets of a particular faith? How far dare we venture for the sake of religious good-neighbourliness? In short, is Paris worth a mass?

In a recent book, the noted French journalist, Jean-Claude Guillebaud

rejects any form of religious relativism that enfeebled faith- and belief systems for the sake of tolerance. He appeals to Pierre Bayle, one of the great French thinkers of the seventeenth century (although he spent the major part of his career in Holland), who argued that only in an environment in which the undiluted integrity of each faith and belief-system is maintained will genuine religious diversity and tolerance be able to flourish, just as the vaulted roof of a medieval cathedral will not collapse as long as the pillars that support it, remain strong.

Granted, religious diversity in North America in the twenty-first century is far more complex than it was in seventeenth century France, and the risk of conflict much higher. At a time when appealing to the lowest common denominator is often seen as the only risk-free solution to the presence of so many religions on our campuses, it is important to remember that a watered-down approach to religion may have the appearance of being tolerant, but in the long run, through the ignorance and misunderstanding it creates, it will lead to even greater intolerance.

Andre Basson is the new CRC campus minister at Brock University in St. Catharines, On. He holds a doctorate in Latin from the University of Provence (France). Before coming to Brock, he taught Classics at a number of universities in South Africa and the US.



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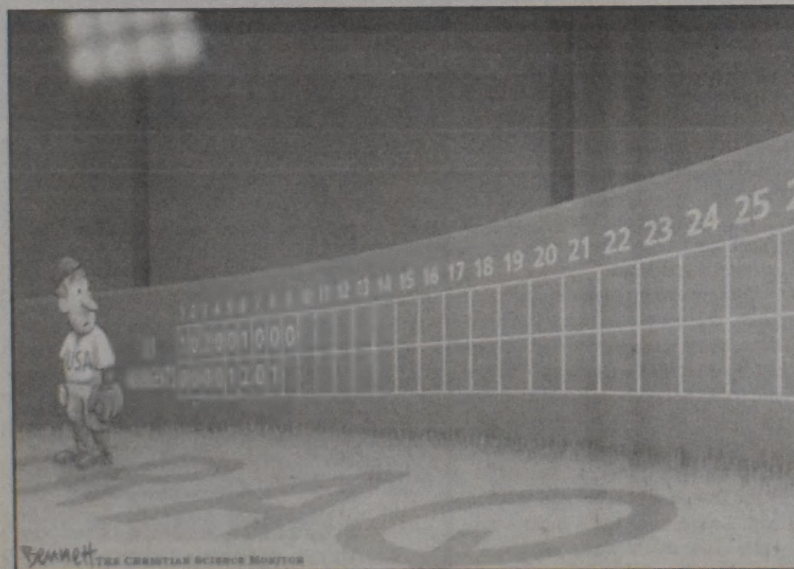
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60th anniversary

Vacation time in the late 50s

In the fifties not everyone could afford to take a vacation, at least not one of any duration. My family never had an automobile, so our vacation was a day here and a day there as friends took us along to Elk Island Park or to Ma-me-o Beach.

But, counseled Remkes Kooistra in the late fifties, if it is at all possible, take a break. Don't allow stinginess or the desire for more material goods to rob you and your family of the occasional vacation. It isn't a waste of money.

But Kooistra warned against certain dangers or extremes. Here are several kinds of bad vacationers that Kooistra conjured up.

The spend-maniacs

Some see vacation as a time to indulge all your desires and those of your kids. Don't think that the way to relax is to toss out all limits and spend more than you have.

The distance-maniacs

This is summed up in the boast: "We put on over 6,000 miles this vacation." After a while everything zooming past your window at 110 kph begins to look the same. Children become cranky and parents keep snarling. "Stop your whining! You can hold it for another 20 minutes.... You want me to stop here and let you walk?"

The fun maniacs

For some vacation means pursuing wild diversions. They dash from one form of amusement to another, from the zoo to the amusement park to white-water rafting.

The visit maniacs

Some set out with a long list of family members and friends whom they have to visit. They look up second and third cousins and pay them a surprise visit. "What's the matter, don't you remember me? Look, we brought along our kids - that's right five of them. And that's Bruno, our St. Bernard."

Hobby maniacs

For him or her vacation is a time to indulge in some obsession - like gardening or carpentry or fishing. The problem is that hobbies are usually not shared, so it often becomes a solitary occupation. Everyone in the family is left to amuse himself in his own way. There is no family togetherness.

A real vacation may mean a little extra spending, perhaps some travel and visiting, but above all it should be a time for the entire family. It's a time to rest up physically and spiritually, and everyone will do that in his or her own way. We may thank God for vacations and use them as a time to express that thankfulness.

Thank you, R.K. Still good advice 47 years later.

"Are you in a hurry?" asks an article by Martin Vrieze in the next issue of CC (August 29, 1958). Our age has seen a tremendous increase in tempo, he writes - and this was still in the fifties, before many of us had television and no one had personal computers or the internet. We are all in a hurry, and as a result, we are becoming more superficial. We prefer a 90 minute film over a 400-page book. We don't take the time



Dooyeweerd with coffee and a cigar to listen.

Vrieze doesn't paint a black-and-white picture. Greater efficiency has also brought benefits. But he does ask why we so often end up saying, "I'd like to but I don't have the time."

Near the end of his article he asks whether preaching is also suffering: Is it becoming more shallow and is worship becoming more hurried too? He reminds the churches that pastors need time to study not just Scripture but also the times in which we live.

For a moment there I thought he was going to make a case for longer vacations for ministers, but I should have known better. Martin Vrieze wanted to give them more time to read more books - more Kuyper and Bavinck and more contemporary writers.

Contrast that with advice to preachers dished out nowadays. They are told to spice up their sermons with allusions to popular culture - movies and pop songs. But what better place to learn about the spirit of the times.

That's right: turn on the radio, pop a movie into the VCR, pour yourself a tall glass of lemonade and do a little research into the spirit of the times. I'm looking forward to it myself.

As if to witness to the fact that we Calvinists do know how to enjoy nature and one another and simply hang loose, Tini van Ameyede describes her vacation with friends and family - a tribe of five families with a total of 14 children at Ma-Me-O Beach near Edmonton.

Luckily she got to share a cabin with her brother who had spent six years in the marines and imposed a military discipline on the unruly lot. He answered any protests with the charge of "Insubordination!" Fortunately, he was taken down a peg or two when the whole crew went horseback riding and his military discipline was exposed as sham by a stubborn horse.

Tini informs us that the owner of the cabins, an elderly Russian woman, had grumbled and growled about the previous renters who had left the cabins in a frightful mess. When she heard that the tribe coming in

was Dutch, her face brightened: "Yes, Dutch is clean people!" she declared. At the end of the week, therefore, they had a reputation to uphold and scrubbed the cabins from stem to stern. The Russian owner was very pleased and invited them to come back next year.

I'm not sure the Dutch reputation for cleanliness is completely deserved. I'd only just turned six when we left The Netherlands, but one thing I remember from our neighborhood is the strong smell of urine in the passageway (poort) between buildings. Dutch men felt free to pee against walls in any dark corner of town whenever they were so inclined. Some of them had to be warned that this was contrary to Canadian custom and law.

Our preacher should have told the men, "You can't just wee-wee wherever you want in this country; you'll ruin our Calvinist reputation." But in those days preachers weren't into relevance. And it wasn't part of the ten commandments - and they were too busy reading Kuyper and Bavinck.

On to higher things. What else did that community of Dutch immigrants do in the summer? Why, hold a big rally, of course. On the Labor Day weekend of 1958 they came from all over Alberta to Calgary where they rented Grace Presbyterian Church to have enough room for the crowd.

During the two-day rally, they relaxed, sat back and refreshed their minds with lectures by Herman Dooyeweerd and Paul Schrotenboer. On Saturday Dooyeweerd addressed the question, "What is man?" (That included women in those days.) On Sunday, the first service was in English and the second in Dutch. Monday morning Schrotenboer asked, "What is our Christian calling in Canada?"

After Dooyeweerd spoke, one of the participants was heard to say, "I didn't understand a word of it!" But, said the reporter, the question period demonstrated that most of the people caught the drift of Dooyeweerd's speech pretty well and they came with lots of questions. In fact, the famed professor made himself much better understood in the question and answer period than in the speech proper. That's often the case with philosophers: first they speak in strange tongues and then they explain themselves.

On Monday afternoon Dooyeweerd spoke on "Democracy and the totalitarian state."

"Who knew that even in Christian circles there were so many different ideas about democracy?" observed our reporter. He came away with a much deeper awareness that there are terrains in which the state has no business because their purposes conflict with those of the state. From Dooyeweerd, he also learned that modern democracy is not a bulwark against totalitarianism. Take Germany, for example: in a short



And you thought the fifties was a time when men were men and women did nothing but clean house! According to a public opinion survey of the time, Canadian men were pretty helpful around the house - more so than their fathers and grandfathers. In the survey 61 percent of the wives said men helped in doing housework, while 75 percent of the men claimed to do so. That's a discrepancy of only 14 percent. The discrepancy, according to the pollsters, is due to the way the two sexes define housework. Men consider things like putting on storm windows, tidying the workshop in the basement and putting away the newspaper housework. Women don't.

time it went from being a democracy to a totalitarian state.

There was more, much more than deep discussion, of course. There was silliness and fun - and a play directed by none other than Remkes Kooistra. All in all, not a bad way to round out the summer.

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CRC anniversary

An immigrant to Lethbridge, Alberta in 1926 writes home

As part of the CRC's 100th anniversary, we publish here a letter written by Willem Nieboer in 1926. He was one of the first members of the first CRC in Canada.

Willem Nieboer and Elsiens van der Leest were married in Odoorn, in the Province of Drenthe, the Netherlands, in 1901. They were blessed with seven children, Harm, Jan, Anna Romkina, Jenne, Berend, Anno, and Willem Arend. The family moved to Emden, Germany, on July 10, 1910, but because of a severe shortage of food in Germany, they returned to The Netherlands in 1917.

Harm, the eldest son, emigrated to Canada in 1924 at the age of 22. In the spring of 1926, when they were both 46 years old, Willem and Elsiens, together with four of their sons, Jenne age 17, Berend age 14, Anno age 12 and Willem Arend age 3, also emigrated to Canada. It was their plan to join Harm in the Pincher Creek area of Alberta.

The second eldest son, Jan age 22, decided to remain in the Netherlands with his fiancée, Marie van Est. Anna Romkina, their only daughter, who was 20 years of age, also remained in The Netherlands.

The following letter was written by Willem Nieboer to his relatives in Holland after he and his family arrived in Springridge, Alberta. An unknown family member preserved the letter for more than 20 years. Following World War II it was returned to the sender by a relative of Elsiens van der Leest.



Nieboer family before emigrating

oculist and finally, by the Canadian Consul. It is easy to understand that we were very glad, when on Tuesday evening we could embark.

We got a cabin on deck, not a lower cabin. It was a six-person cabin, which meant that we could all stay together. Everything was unpacked, for we had to stay here about ten days. It was nearly 9:30 p.m. when we said goodbye to Jan, Anna and Marie Van Est. When we lay down, we all were dead tired.

Our boat was supposed to weigh anchor that same night at 3:00 a.m. and I thought that I would notice it, and have an opportunity to look out and perhaps see our native soil for the last time. Nothing came out of that, however, for we didn't wake up until dawn on Wednesday, March 17 and by that time we were a long way into the English channel. At 1:00 p.m. the beautiful rocky French coast appeared; by 2:00 p.m. we were in Bologne Harbour, where embarkation took place. A French passenger-boat came alongside and we took on the passengers who were joining us; mail was also delivered to our boat. Everything went quickly; the anchor was weighed again and a course was steered for to Southampton, England.

The food on board was excellent, in the morning we had bread, meat, pudding, eggs, cheese and coffee or tea; at noon we ate potatoes, meat, vegetables, pudding and much more. In the afternoon we were served tea with cake, in the evening "hutspot", plus bread with wurst and cheese. At every meal we had fruit, oranges or apples or something else. After supper everybody enjoyed himself with all kinds of games on deck, skipping rope, dancing, playing piano or singing.

By 9:00 p.m. the English coastal lights showed up and we sailed toward shore with the Volendam still going full speed. But at last we were tired of looking and decided to go to bed. Sleeping went very well, although

the bed was extraordinarily narrow.

After a good night of rest we woke up in the morning of Thursday, March 18 and left the cabin immediately to see what was happening on deck; we could tell that our ship was lying idle. Soon we found out that we were in Southampton Harbour where we had a splendid view. Over the water and across the beach we could see, built on rocks, beautiful villas that had spectacular views. The houses were mostly surrounded by trees and shrubs; through the binoculars we all could see beautiful country homes with nice avenues and gardens.

The weather was beautiful, the sea was smooth and a gentle breeze was blowing; we had to wait here for an inspection to determine if everything was okay for the sea voyage.

This morning's breakfast was excellent again, bread, apricots, cheese, meat, "hutspot" and tea etc. This morning Jenne saw the ship's doctor; he was laid up with a severe headache. The doctor gave us some medicine and advised that we keep him in bed. The next day, Friday, March 19, The Volendam is again on the ocean. Jenne showed a little improvement, but he didn't like to be on deck.

The weather had turned colder and the sea was getting more and more choppy. Gradually there were fewer people on deck. On Saturday, March 20th, jumping and singing on deck was not heard anymore. An occasional pale face was still around to cast something overboard. Nets were fastened on board and ropes were stretched across the deck for the passengers to hold on to. The wind had turned into a gale and the seas came on deck. Billows dashed against the rolling ship. Nobody is on deck anymore, except those who had to throw something overboard.

By Tuesday, March 23, it is possible to write again, for now we are improving. We all were laid up for three days, as sea-sick

as a cat. The wind was constantly whistling through the rigging; it was cold and the weather was rough. Our Willy had a bad cold and the doctor gave him cough medicine. We could not taste our food yet. Our dining-hall was located on the stern and it felt as if one was sitting in a swing-boat. Sea-sickness is a nasty perception, always a disgusting feeling in the stomach. One was continually leaning towards vomiting. We hoped that the weather will improve and the wind would abate.

The wind had subsided, but then we ran into a dense fog; our ship glided quietly and majestically across the large surface, continually tooting the steam whistle, giving signals to other ships, in order to prevent a collision. The meals were good again this morning; besides, we felt quite a bit better, so that we liked the food very well.

The weather was still quite good, but the fog stayed. In fact, it was getting denser, so that we could not see ten meters ahead. The passengers were getting worried. The captain remained on the bridge day and night. Our ship traveled about 365 miles in 24 hours and we were told that on Friday, March 26th we would be in Halifax.

On a sea-voyage such as this there is much variety. One meets all kinds of people. The one person had some game or other, another was taking pictures, a third one, with his binoculars, watched a big freighter that was passing.

Jenne is now all right and is eating again, as if he will work off arrears. At present Willy doesn't feel good; he is listless and is having a bad cold, presumably he is still a little sea-sick.

On the evening of Wednesday the 24th the fog was getting still denser, and so our ship ran at half speed ahead because of the danger for icebergs from Newfoundland.

Thursday morning, the 25th, showed a better day. The sky was clear, the fog had cleared up and the "Volendam" was running at full speed. There were rumors that we would reach Halifax by nightfall. The weather was cold; all was well with us, except for Willy who was still laid up, although he was now somewhat better. The other passengers enjoyed themselves watching the flying fish, which by tens were flying 50 - 100 meters (out of the water) above the water. Generally, it was a day that went by without peculiarity; we slept well that night.

"Halifax in sight" is what we heard in the washroom on the Friday morning of March 26th. Indeed, before we knew it, we were already in the harbor. Two tugboats towed our ship in along bare docks, with rocks on both sides. On the rocks we saw negro cottages.

At last, it was eight o'clock; we were moored to a quay wall, where a huge shed

Continued on p. 8

Springridge, Alberta, April 18, 1926

Dear Family,

At present I am sitting down to write a letter to you. We are all still in good health, but it took a long time for us to recover, for a voyage like ours is not a small thing. Here are the highlights of our voyage.

On Monday, March 15, 1926, at 11:30 a.m. we arrived at Rotterdam. Upon our arrival at the train station we noticed a man was waiting on the platform with the badge "H.A.L." When we approached him, he advised us to deliver our luggage to a porter, who would see to it that everything arrived at our destination.

We walked on with more emigrants, along a detour, until we found at last the building of the H.A.L. (Holland America Line). When we arrived there we had to show our papers and everything was arranged; we received a boat ticket and a number for the cabin and cards for going to the physician, for we all had to be examined. All that did not proceed so smoothly, for there were approximately 1,000 people who wanted to sail with the Volendam.

We accomplished so much on Monday that by Tuesday, March 16, we could get our visa. However, they were very boring days; we had to drag from one building to the other. In addition, everywhere around us was a stream of people, who were waiting, waiting and waiting. First we had to be examined by the medical doctor, then by an

CRC anniversary

An immigrant...continued from p.7

had been built. (I forgot to say, that a day before our landing we had to be examined by the ship's doctor). Everything was arranged now for the landing. Our luggage was packed and we all had to go on deck with our landing papers in hand. Then we landed, walking two by two across the gangway and into the shed.

There was a big hall, exactly like a church, where we were all seated on benches. We were not there long before we had to go on. Since we were sitting in the front row we were the first to leave, through a long corridor. Somebody stood at intervals, telling us where we had to go. Once again we came to a doctor, who examined our eyes. Then we came to a man, who, checking our papers, had to know our destination, how much money we had and other questions like that.

When we arrived at the wicket, where we had to buy the train tickets, there was somebody who talked Dutch. What a relief! That man helped me to get the tickets. Mother and children went into a compartment of the Red Cross and each got a cup of tea. In the same huge building was a grocery store, where we made our purchases for the train trip, which would take five days and nights.

The time drew near to look for the train, for at 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon it would depart. It was a special train for immigrants, everything furnished neatly. We sat down in a carriage with velvet pillows but we had to leave it, for that was a women's compartment. Then we got another carriage that had leather pillows with springs, and benches. The luggage was placed above the benches. By pulling on a spring a big flap fell open, where we could place the luggage and all our belongings. The flap closed again and everything was all right.

After that we went through the train, for one can walk from front to back through the whole train. We noticed at the end of our carriage that there was a small room; a cook stove was standing there with coal and there was a washing room for ladies and gentlemen (separate). The Moman family of Holland-scheveld, who traveled with us, had a kettle and we had coffee and tea with us. We soon made a fire and in no time we sat down and had coffee, exactly as if we were at home. Between the benches we could place a little table, which could also be extended.

Before we realized it the train was rolling. We were glad that at last we were in the train and now we could look out and see what Canada looked like. Outside Halifax we passed through beautiful villages, provided with one or two churches, which looked on the outside very prosperous. We enjoyed looking out of the window but at last it was getting dark and we had to stop looking out.

In the beautifully lit train, the one enjoyed reading, the second one enjoyed music and a third one did something else, until it was bedtime. We extended our benches and had a



Dutch immigrants waiting for the train in Halifax

nice bed with a spring-mattress, we wrapped ourselves up in a blanket and the train was heated well, so that we slept like a log.

This went on day and night; it was absolutely not monotonous. Then we came into the neighborhood of Montreal. Montreal lies on a river and is a big city, bigger than Amsterdam. We now had to take a railway-bridge across the river. It was a splendid bridge and compared to it, Moerdijk is mere child's play. There was almost no end to it and then we "steamed" into Montreal.

It was Saturday, March 27th, when we went through Montreal. In the train everything for sale was expensive and when the train stopped we had time to make some purchases. But we had still enough on hand and therefore we remained in the train. After a wait of forty minutes the train went on,

Now it was far from beautiful. Between Halifax and Montreal we had seen such beautiful villages, but now we saw only rocks and forest. Everything was wild; we only saw a bird. For the rest, there was nothing else but high rocks grown with forest.

We passed Ottawa at 9:00 p.m. It was a nice city, and the capital of Canada. We were told that the train would stop there for a while. We left the train to be on the platform, but three of our fellow-travelers went into the city for a moment to buy something. In the meantime the train departed, so that those three farmers' sons from Groningen stayed behind. Luckily they could speak English and thus they were able to arrive in Winnipeg only a day later than we did. Their luggage, even their hats went with our train.

We slept through the night and we traveled all day Sunday, March 28. Looking out of the window of the train we again saw nothing else than rocks for hundreds of miles. What an inhospitable region!

Then at last we saw a station of importance; the train would remain there for 40 minutes. At that time mother and I went to a store to buy something and to send a telegram to Harm that we were progressing. When we arrived at the train again, our car-

riage was uncoupled due to a defect. We had to find a place in another carriage, but there was no place left and it was a small station where no carriage was available. We went into the small room where the stove was, sat down on our luggage, till at last towards the evening we got another carriage. We and the Moman family had it all for ourselves; now we had enough room again to sleep.

It was now Monday, March 29, 1926. After a good sleep and having had coffee and sandwiches we approached Winnipeg. The country became gradually level. One hundred miles from the city it became nice country and the snow was almost gone. It seemed to freeze hard at night, however, in the day-time the weather was nice. It was two o'clock in the afternoon when we arrived at the Winnipeg station; here all the travelers had to get out.

We came into the big station, where men, who spoke all the languages of the world, stood ready. There were Russians, Poles, Belgians, Germans, Italians as well as Hollanders on the train and these men helped us on our way. We had to go to another station which belonged to another railway - The Canadian Pacific Railway. Soon we found a Dutchman, who helped us.

We went in an electric tramway-car to the other station, delivered our luggage there and learned then that our train would depart for Lethbridge at 10:45 p.m. So we had time to have something to eat in a restaurant, since we had had no warm meal for a couple of days. After that we had a look at Winnipeg. It is a nice city and we saw a bazaar where hundreds of clerks were working. We heard that soon it would be enlarged again; this summer from April till November 600 people will be working on the annexation.

But it was so cold, that our Willy could not stand it anymore in the street and we decided to go back to the station where everything was heated. At last it was time to go to our train and we could settle for the night. It was a nice train, everything velvet,

but we lost our fellow-travelers, the Moman family with their kettle, so that we missed our coffee. When we woke up the next morning we got on well, for the trains here run surprisingly fast. The locomotive has a whistle exactly the same as the one of the potato-flour mill in De Krin; it is roaring.

As always we were curious to know what environment we were in. We had a good view from the train and the country was fairly level. Indeed, we now saw real grain fields for the first time. There were three more stations to Regina, a city on a point of intersection. Here we saw beautiful farms. We saw cattle outside everywhere in spite of the fact that the night before it froze bitterly. But it is going to be a nice day. The sun was in a cloudless sky but the work had not yet begun.

It was Tuesday, March 30th, 10:30 a.m. when we entered Regina. This is about half of our trip between Winnipeg and Lethbridge. Regina is a nice city; I think it is the capital of Saskatchewan. We are "steaming" on, the sky is so clear, that we can see a huge distance. Across the large plain we see the farmhouses lying scattered, beautiful pastures, white painted houses with green roofs reflecting in the rays of the spring sun. Time is flying, our train is also "flying" and in the meantime we have approached Swift Current.

Again we are at an intersection, the one line goes to Shackleton, where J. Salomons lives and our line goes to Lethbridge. The country is getting hilly, but beautiful. The cattle are in big herds in the prairie; hares and rabbits, which we see everywhere, jump away from the railway. We have to change trains once more at Medicine Hat, where we have to wait about two hours. We will likely arrive at Lethbridge tonight.

After changing trains we are on the way again and without delay we will reach Lethbridge tonight at 3:30 a.m. Now we arrived at our destination and we took our luggage and went into the waiting room. We were told by the station-master that we had to go on to Brocket. Harm had phoned him. Our tickets had expired, so we had to buy new ones and we boarded the train again. At last, at 6:00 a.m. we arrived at Brocket.

Now I will finish, for if I write more, then I will repeat. This is the principal thing of the voyage. Much can be seen, Canada is so large; it is also a nice country. It has a healthy clear sky, huge natural scenes, big waterfalls, sky-high mountains, deep valleys, big rivers, immeasurable forests, splendid green vales, beautiful lakes and many fountains; in short it is a beautiful country. But a more beautiful country is still waiting for us, the city which has foundations, the Artist and Builder of which is God.

There is no sin, no pains and sorrow. And to become an inhabitant of that City I wish to you all!

Your Dad

Translated by B. Vos on May 10, 1989 from the original handwritten copy.

Church

Church of England vote opens way for women bishops, possible split

Cedric Pulford

London (ENI) – The Church of England, the founding institution of worldwide Anglicanism, has voted to open the way for women bishops, 11 years after women were first admitted as priests, but faces a potential split on the issue.

The church's ruling general synod met in the northern English city of York and made the decision on July 11 by 367 votes to 127. It decided to "set in train" a process to remove legal obstacles to women bishops, with the issue to return to synod next year.

But the Bishop of Chichester, John Hind, told the synod the motion was "premature and a dangerous precedent,"

John Hind

as there had not been a theological debate in the church about whether women should be bishops.

Three regions of the worldwide Anglican Communion – New Zealand, Canada and the United States – have already appointed women bishops. A Church of England report last year said women bishops had been accepted in principle in 11 more provinces, as church regions are called.

That report commented: "The Church of England will not be able to commend the gospel effectively if its structures embody sexism in a way that contemporary society no

longer finds acceptable."

It also predicted that pressure for the ordination of women to all ministerial offices would be felt by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches "in the longer term."

Opening the synod debate, the Bishop of Southwark, Tom Butler, said: "I believe that there are good ecclesiological and theological reasons why women should now be able to be ordained bishop."

Christina Rees, the chair of national WATCH (Women and the Church), which campaigns for women's equality in the church, welcomed the synod decision.

She said: "To delay any longer would have further sapped [the church's] energies and wasted some of our most precious resources – dedicated, gifted, experienced and faithful women."

But opponents of the measure demanded separate arrangements for those who could not accept the authority of women bishops.

Rod Thomas, spokesperson for the evangelical group Reform, which is opposed to women as bishops on biblical grounds, said a separate diocese would be needed for those who could not accept women as bishops.

The Bishop of Ebbsfleet, Andrew Burnham, told the Sunday Times newspaper before the vote he would leave the church unless proper arrangements were made for opponents of women bishops. He expected about 800 clergy would do the same. The Church of England has about 9000 stipendiary priests.

Leader of evangelical Baptist group warns against split over homosexuality

WASHINGTON – The general secretary of the American Baptist Churches USA (ABC) urged members during their recent biennial meeting to not let division over homosexuality endanger the denomination's future.

"The issue of homosexuality has brought us as a denomination to a crossroad in our life together," the Rev. A. Roy Medley said in a sermon on the opening day of the three-day meeting. "One road will lead to separation. The other path will lead us to shared ministry and mission in all the theological and ethnic richness that has come to make us the unique denomination we are."

Medley reiterated his past

personal declaration that he is "conservative in matters related to human sexuality," but does not want to be separated from those who disagree with him.

The denomination, known for being both evangelical and ecumenical, has struggled with the issue of homosexuality. Regional leaders issued a pastoral letter last December warning that the debate "threatens to break us apart."

In 2003, the denomination's general board approved the creation of the Evergreen Baptist Association, which includes congregations in the Northwest that welcome gays and lesbians. The association disagrees with larger and more theologically conservative ABC congregations.

United Church of Christ in US endorses same-sex marriage

Chris Herlinger

New York, (ENI) – The United Church of Christ (UCC) has become the first major denomination in the United States to endorse same-sex marriage.

In a move heralded as historic by gay-rights proponents and criticised by opponents of same sex relationships, the UCC's general synod, meeting in Atlanta, on July 4 voted overwhelmingly in favour of a resolution that "affirms equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender."

The resolution does not establish a policy for the 1.3-million-member denomination because the UCC has an autonomous governing structure, and the denomination's churches are under no obligation to follow

the synod's recommendations.

John H. Thomas, the denomination's president, noted the symbolism of adopting the resolution on the US Independence Day holiday.

"On this July Fourth the general synod of the United Church of Christ has acted courageously to declare freedom, affirming marriage equality, affirming the civil rights of same gender couples to have their relationships recognised as marriages by the state, and encouraging our local churches to celebrate and bless those marriages," he said.

Before the vote, opponents of the measure expressed their displeasure with the resolution and several said that some UCC congregations might leave if it

were approved.

The UCC's Biblical Witness Fellowship, a caucus within the denomination, called on Thomas to resign. It said he had rejected "the foundational covenant of marriage as instituted by Almighty God, the covenant from which all other human covenants derive, and which is the very image of the relationship between the church and Jesus Christ."

The denomination traces its roots to the Congregationalists and Puritans in colonial America. The denomination was the first US church to ordain a woman and a black man as clergy members. In 1972, the UCC was the first major US denomination to ordain an openly gay minister.

Muslim convert released from Egyptian mental hospital

(Compass) – Gasir Mohammed Mahmoud was discharged on June 9 from his locked psychiatric ward in Cairo and set free, five months after he was forcibly committed to a mental hospital for converting from Islam to Christianity. Mahmoud, 31, was tortured by security police and then beaten

at times and given heavy doses of medication twice daily at the El-Khanka Hospital for Mental and Neurological Health. He was committed to the mental hospital in January after his adoptive Muslim parents became alarmed to learn that he had converted to Christianity two years earlier. Mahmoud's

supervising physician told him he would never be allowed to leave the hospital unless he came back to Islam. But a round of international publicity released in May focused considerable attention on the case, apparently convincing hospital authorities to discharge him.

Canadian Lutherans faces backlash over same-sex blessings' plan

Ferdy Baglo

Vancouver, Canada (ENI) – The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is divided ahead of a July 21-24 meeting in Winnipeg at which it is to consider a resolution that would give congregations a "local option" to institute blessings for same-sex couples.

Opponents have garnered 4000 signatures – among them more than 100 pastors – on a Statement of Concern protesting against the resolution drafted by the denomination's national church council. The opponents say the proposal is divisive and wrong and should be defeated.

Retired pastor Lothar Schwabe of Edmonton said, "As I get feedback from pastors and lay-people, I note that our national leadership

has lost the trust and confidence of many people."

A majority of the bishops have given their support to the resolution, which they feel is a compromise to meet the rising pressure nationally for equal rights.

The convention resolution reads: "That the ELCIC allow pastors to perform blessings for same sex couples who want to make a life-long commitment to one another in the presence of God and their community of faith. Authorisation to perform such blessings shall require the consent of the pastor, the consent of the congregation or calling agency as expressed by a 2/3 majority vote at a duly called meeting, and consultation with the synodical bishop. These blessings

shall use a rite authorised by this church."

The Statement of Concern states that such action goes against the church's constitution, that it will fracture the solidarity of the church, and that faithfulness to theological and biblical teaching is being abandoned.

It is reported that other independent Lutheran groups already have indicated a willingness to welcome any congregations that wish to withdraw from the ELCIC if this issue is not cleared up to their satisfaction.

The resolution will be voted on July 23 by the 414 voting delegates representing the denomination's 133 000 confirmed members in Canada.

Christian leaders send persecution memo to Nigerian reform conference

Nigeria (Compass) – Leaders of the Christian Association of Nigeria submitted a memorandum to the nation's National Political Reform Conference on June 9, cataloguing cases of persecution and discrimination against Christians. The leaders claim that while the Nigerian constitution professes a secular

status for the nation, state governments in northern Nigeria are Islamic institutions whose main task is to promote and propagate Islam using public funds.

Twelve northern states have implemented Islamic law.

The memorandum alleges discriminatory religious policies,

including confiscating mission schools, hiring Islamic religious teachers, and denying land for church buildings. The reform conference is expected to draft a revised constitution that will then be presented to President Olusegun Obasanjo.

War remembrance

Hunger winter: turned away

Having arrived in Genemuiden with his wife and children, Sietze Jongsma finds his way blocked. He can't cross on the ferry without papers. A sympathetic policeman provides forged papers, and although his wife and kids cross successfully, Sietze is stopped by German soldiers guarding the crossing.

As the two German soldiers are interrogating him and threatening to put him to work, Sietze sees his family safely pass by and vanish in the distance. HdN

When the crisis is greatest, rescue is near. The saying was true this time too. Just then the ferry, making its second crossing, touched shore, disgorging its load.

Among the passengers were another two men with bicycles. They seemed intent on passing by the soldiers without so much as a by-your-leave. But they had figured wrong. The soldiers hollered at them to stop, and they immediately obeyed.

They were ordered to produce their papers, but they had none. However, they were not afraid to speak up for themselves; a lawyer couldn't have done a better job. Soon the Germans and the two men were engaged in a loud quarrel.

This was my chance. The two German soldiers were completely engaged with the other men and had turned their backs to me. Very casually, step by step I began moving away, expecting to hear a shout or a shot any moment.

But nothing happened. The four men continued hollering and arguing with each other. The farther I got away from the soldiers the longer my strides.

On the other side of the road was the steep slope of the polder dike. Risking one last glance behind me, I saw that their backs were still toward me, so I sped down the slope of the dike. In the process I tumbled head over heels in the grass. But now I was completely hidden from the soldiers' view. Quickly I scrambled to my feet, jumped on my bike and pedaled away as fast as I could. Cycling in the grass was hard going, but, driven by fear and anxiety, I hardly noticed.

After traveling about one kilometer, however, I was spent. By then the Germans were out of eyeshot. Stepping off my bike, I climbed back onto the road and began pedaling as fast as my legs could go.

It wasn't long before I caught up to the Red Cross vehicle carrying my wife and children. Happy and grateful to be reunited, we once again continued our journey together. It was growing dark by this time and much colder. By the time we reached Blokzijl, it was almost 5:30.

Our previous host had given us an address where he said we might be able to stay overnight. Spotting a small group of people talking beside the road, we stopped and

asked directions. It turned out that we had already come too far. A man and a woman separated themselves from the group to show us the way.

As we walked along, I told the man a little about our journey and our plans to ask for shelter for the night. Our guide frowned at that and said, "I don't know if that is such a good idea. Those people don't have a very good reputation around here."

A new setback. However, by this time it was dark, we were here, and we needed shelter for the night.

Having come to the address we were given, I told the elderly couple why we had come. But the woman began scolding me, so I soon concluded that there was no chance we'd get any help here. I had to return to Ankje and the children waiting on the road to tell them we had been turned away.

The couple who had guided us here were also still there. "What are you going to do now?" asked the man.

We were standing out in the cold in the middle of winter, so the question was easy to answer. All we could do is to go knocking on doors begging to be taken in.

Hearing my answer, the man had a whispered conversation with his wife. Then he turned and said, "We may leave dogs and cats out in the cold once in a while, but not people. If you're not too fussy and something basic will do, then you can stay with us tonight."

I can't describe how relieved and thankful we were. Quickly assembling our baggage once again, we followed our saviors through the dark streets. Soon we reached the outskirts of the town and turned down a country road.

My wife and I figured we were headed toward the house of a farmhand, but we didn't ask any questions. Even if they had led us to a barn, we'd have been happy.

But our expectations turned out to be completely wrong, for we suddenly found ourselves standing before a large houseboat. Soon we were cautiously inching across a gangplank and then climbing down into the spacious hold of the boat with all our bags and suitcases.

A little later we were all sitting in the neatly arranged living room of the boat. Outside it was beginning to freeze hard, but here it was warm and cosy. This was just what we needed, for now that the weather was turning wintry, the trip was beginning to tell on us. We had been on the road too long. We had come to the conclusion that walking day after day looking for food and shelter was very demanding.

Physically and psychologically, we were nearing the end of our strength. It was becoming harder and harder for us to deal with the cold and the setbacks. Our vehicles were



also the worse for wear. Ankje's feet were blistered and bleeding, so we were eager for our journey to come to an end. Fortunately, on this, the first day of Christmas, the end of our journey was in sight.

We planned to walk as far as Lemmer the next day. The following day should bring us to our destination.

The man and his wife gave us all sorts of advice. We had received a lot of compassion and help along the way, but this couple outdid themselves for us. They did everything they could to make us comfortable. We were almost tempted never to leave.

The lady brought out everything she could think of that would be good for us and to our liking. Things had looked very bleak for us a little earlier that night, but now we saw that we had been anxious for no reason. We couldn't have found better treatment than these people provided.

After we had been fed and feted, we sat together till late enjoying one another's company. At last we made our way to our beds through a very narrow passageway.

We had never slept in a boat before. It took us several attempts to find the right way to clamber into bed. There simply wasn't enough room to get into bed the way we would normally. The quarters were so tight that we had a feeling we were going to suffocate in that small space. We slept badly that night, and it was impossible to sit up in bed, for there wasn't enough headroom.

It was a relief when at last it began to grow light and we could crawl out of our cramped space.

Early in the morning, after we had been served a good breakfast and been well supplied by our host and hostess, we said goodbye to our generous hosts.

It was the second day of Christmas. The weather was clear but cold. Our hosts accompanied us along the dike to the main road. As we set out, the sky slowly turned red in the east — a promising sign. It looked as if we would have a good day for traveling.

It wasn't long, however, before we encountered our first setback. The wheel of the

buggy, which had already given us trouble before, now gave out. This time there was no repairing it.

However, we were on a broad road without a house in sight, so we had no choice but to push it along on three wheels until we reached the nearest house. This was no easy task, for it was heavily loaded with Dutsina, the baby, as well as other baggage.

After an arduous number of kilometers, we reached Blankenham, where we spotted a café attached to a farmhouse. Here we decided to have a cup of coffee while I tried to make whatever repairs I could to carry us to Kuinre. There we would look for a blacksmith or someone else who could get the buggy back in working order.

No matter what I tried, however, I had no luck. The wheel was broken and only a good blacksmith could fix it.

The owner of the café came to have a look, but he didn't have any idea of how to fix it either.

I don't recall who came up with the idea, but someone came up with the idea of giving us a lift by horse and wagon to the town of Kuinre. In Kuinre there was an evacuation office, where we might be helped further.

The café owner's son was enlisted for the job of driving us to Kuinre. He wasn't very eager, however, for there was ice on the canals and the weather was perfect for skating. He was standing at the door holding his skates. Although he was reluctant, the ladies managed to persuade him and at last he agreed.

The horse was hitched to the wagon and our baggage loaded on along with Ankje and the children. Then something else happened that we had not expected, but this time it was a welcome surprise.

Before leaving The Hague we had asked a good friend who worked at a government agency to call a police officer named Hoving in my home town and to ask him to tell my parents that we were on the way and they could expect us in a few days.

We had expected to travel by bicycle, however, and had been forced to walk instead, so the journey had taken us much longer. My parents were unaware of our

Remembrance/Women

troubles, of course, so they had become very worried when we didn't arrive as expected. So my father and sister had set out in the hopes of tracking us down.

The only thing they knew, however, was that we had taken the overland route, not the Afsluitdijk. But this still left numerous other possibilities, so they were just guessing.

Although it was a matter of hit or miss, they happened to have chosen the right route. We had no sooner set out by wagon, than we met them on the road. What a surprise. We couldn't believe our eyes.

After a quick consultation, we decided to go on to Kuinre, where we would together find a way to continue. The mood of our journey became joyful. The unexpected meeting and the anticipation of a safe haven cheered and revived us.

It was about noon when we arrived in Kuinre and we were soon all sitting in the evacuation office, where we were given coffee. Our previous hosts had given us food for the day's journey, so we did not have to go hungry. We hoped we had gone hungry for the last time.

The man in charge was willing to help us and arranged to have us transported by wagon to Lemmer, where we hoped to hire another wagon or an automobile. Now that we were so close, we were eager to get to the end of our journey. In Lemmer we also had family to help us farther.

But the offices of the Red Cross and the evacuation bureau were closed in Lemmer because it was the second day of Christmas.

After stopping with family for a cup of tea, we discussed how to go on. We were determined to get home that day.

My father and my sister each had a bicycle and so did I. If we had one more bike and left our baggage in Lemmer, we could reach our destination of Bal before curfew. Our family had a bike we could borrow and our baggage could be sent later by truck.

About 6 o'clock on the second day of Christmas 1944 we climbed on our bikes and soon seven very happy people were pedaling toward Balk.

We had begun the journey with high hopes and along the way we had experienced many setbacks and dark moments—but even more instances of compassion and kindness. It was a journey we will never forget.

We were deeply thankful, for we were now in "the promised land" as it were, for we no longer had to worry about going hungry. Meanwhile, many of our fellow countrymen were still straggling along the roads without hope or prospect.

We had finished our journey in ten days, but there were countless others who set out day after day in search of something to eat and who returned to hungry families in the city to share the little they had managed to beg or to buy.

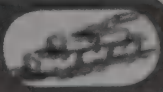
We had seen awful misery along the road, too horrible to describe. We will not soon forget all those people who gave us shelter and who shared their food with us. In a time of war, when there was great hunger, many people showed in word and deed that they were true neighbors.



Timing and dreams

BuildingTrust

Vicky Van Andel Ed.



A few months ago I wrote several columns on an unresolved issue in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), namely that of the role of women in the church. While the CRC has moved forward on this issue in that women may be ordained in churches that support women in office, women are still excluded from voting at the annual synodical meetings, the top level decision making body of the church.

So what happened at Synod 2005? I did not attend the meeting, but have read the notes on the proceedings. These state that, after a long and respectful discussion, it was decided that the time was not yet right for the CRC to open its doors to women any further. Individual churches may ordain women, but women may not attend the Synodical meetings as voting delegates. It was also decided that this issue would not be addressed again until half of all Classes (regional assemblies) were ready to support the ordination of women. Right now 47 per cent of the fifty or so Classes allow the ordination of women.

Needless to say I am disappointed at this outcome. I truly wish the church could move beyond this discussion, open up all roles to both genders and stop spending time and energy on this subject. A lot has been said and done over the past forty years and too much pain has been experienced because of it.

But Synod decided and I have to accept that. I am left wondering where we go from here. I wonder what it will take to encourage a few more Classes to support the ordination of women? That would be the first step. My first inclination is to go to them and tell them about the benefits of the women pastors, elders and deacons. The benefits are so clear to me. How could serving God with all our hearts and souls and mind and each other like ourselves in the best possible ways be wrong? It seems so simple to me. But I've talked about these merits for a long time. And it's not helping.

While to me the issue is quite clear, I know that for the church it is complicated. We are dealing with biblical interpretations, changing times and cultures, and our responsibilities as human beings in the Kingdom of God. There are many questions to be considered. Here are some examples. How do we respond to the society we live in today? What does God's word mean for our lives today, in this world? What exactly did God have in mind for the future when he created Adam and Eve perfectly in the Garden of Eden? Why did he create the snake? What has sin done to the meaning of equality? Is inequality between men and

women precisely because of sin? If so should we not work very hard against this sin? What about Jesus' interaction with women? How literally do we read the Bible? How did women in biblical times really experience their lives, given the Bible was written by men? How are the inequalities in the world such as the poverty and race discrimination related to inequality between the genders?

The most difficult aspect in this whole issue for me is that when we do not support women in ordained ministry we make a judgment about them. We are telling them they may feel called by God to serve as pastor but we judge they may not use their gifts in the way they feel called. We restrict these women, and limit them in the use of their gifts. We pass judgment on them. I have a very hard time with that concept. It is only God who knows our hearts and our deepest desires. God is not a spiritually limiting Being. God invites us to serve with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

In spite of my disappointment with the decision of Synod, I want to trust that God has a message for me in it. I have asked myself what it could be. Could it be that God wants me to trust more rather than to think somehow I have to fix it? The decision at Synod was made in good faith. I have to believe that God has decided that the CRC remain in a state of suspension on the role of women in the church. What can I learn from that state of suspension? Perhaps to be more patient. To trust that God has a plan, and that it will unfold in God's time. Not in my time, but in God's time. The discussion has taken far too long for me already, but maybe I have to be more patient yet. Everything has been put on hold it seems to me. In the end I know and trust that it is God who controls the outcome.

So, in spite of the fact I have many questions, I want to believe that the timing is not yet right for the church. At the same time, I also hope that in due time the right decision will be taken to allow women their rightful place in the church, which includes holding all the church offices. There are many examples in scripture in which the lives of people God loved were kept on hold. Abraham was promised a child but waited for a long time. Too long a time for him. Joseph was sold and later jailed. He waited a long time for his freedom and for God's plan to unfold. May God's plan become clear to us all as the future unfolds and may we find the comfort, trust and faith we all need.

Vicky Van Andel is the editor of this column. Anyone who would like to contribute to this column is invited to contact her via fax at 1-780-473-0970, or e-mail at vickyv@jesus.net

Short story

Old Tilley Trouble and my traveling pumpkin vine

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Old Tilley Trouble caused trouble for all my ten years. And when my pumpkin vine, with my going-to-be-prize-pumpkin, grew underneath her fence, I knew she was going to cause trouble once again.

"That's my pumpkin," I called over the fence.

"What pumpkin, girl?" Old Tilley Trouble asked.

"The little one by your feet," I exclaimed.

She looked at it and declared, "This pumpkin is by my feet. My feet are on my land. So this is my pumpkin! You could have saved yourself a heap of trouble if you'd steered your traveling vine away from the fence."

"But I was away at camp for three weeks," I protested.

Old Tilley Trouble sneered, "When this pumpkin is full grown, I'll chop it up for pies and sell them at the County Fair."

"Pies!" I cried. "But last year I got the seed from Grandpa's prize pumpkin so that I could grow a pumpkin this year and win first prize at the County Fair."

"Is that so?" Old Tilley Trouble croaked.

I ran into my house yelling, "Mama! My pumpkin vine grew beneath the fence. And when my pumpkin is ripe, Old Tilley Trouble is going to chop it up for pies to sell at the County Fair!"

"Oh, Jaclyn," Mama sighed. "You know how Old Tilley Trouble is. If you say 'Yes,' she says 'No.'"

"And," Grandpa interrupted, "If you tell her to cut down her rotting tree before it collapses on us, she says, 'It's healthy.'"

"I know," I said. "If you say, 'That ball is mine,' she says, 'What ball?' Even though it's right in plain sight under her picnic table."

"Old Tilley Trouble," Mama groaned.

"Oh, Mama," I said. "Old Tilley Trouble said I could've saved myself a lot of trouble if I'd steered that traveling vine clear of the fence."

"She's right," Grandpa agreed. "You need to know the character of what or whom you're dealing with."

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"Pumpkin vines travel," Grandpa explained. "That's their character. You know that anything that goes over or under the fence becomes Tilley's. That's her stubborn, greedy character. The pumpkin is hers - for now. But since you know her character, you can outwit her!"

I kissed Grandpa's cheek. If he believes I can outsmart Old Tilley Trouble, I thought, then I can!

All day I thought about Old Tilley Trouble causing trouble every day. Well, I thought,



if she can cause trouble, I'll cause trouble of my own. If I can't have that pumpkin, neither can she. But I can't let Mama know my plan because she'll give me a lecture about returning love for unkindness. I'll wait until tonight and then I'll do it.

After dark when I was sure Mama thought I was asleep, I crept downstairs. When I opened the back door, the wind tugged it violently and slammed it against the wall. Rain lashed my face. Our pine tree bowed its pointy head. I slunk stealthily to the garden.

Switching on my flashlight, I found my pumpkin vine and stood poised to end Old Tilley Trouble's triumph over me. As I reached for it - whoosh! Crack! - Old Tilley Trouble's decaying tree collapsed with a resounding crash. I stood paralyzed, the toppled tree only a few meters away from me.

The back door of the house flew open. Mama, Papa, and Grandpa bolted outside.

"I told Tilley that tree was dangerous!" Papa fumed. "A good thing no one was out here!"

Suddenly, Mama spotted my flashlight's beam. And then she saw me. "Jaclyn! What are you doing? You could've been killed."

She ran to me.

I snuggled against her, quivering. I wasn't about to tell her I had come outside to uproot Old Tilley Trouble's . . . I mean . . . My pumpkin vine.

"Well?" Mama asked.

I clung to her, wet and trembling.

Then Mama spoke her usual remedy for nighttime problems: "We'll talk about it in the morning," she said.

But we didn't because by the next morning Mama's mind was occupied with other things.

It was Papa's yell that woke me. I stumbled to my bedroom window. In the backyard Grandpa lay on the ground by the fallen tree. Mama and Papa kneeling beside him.

I ran downstairs and out the back door, colliding with Mama on her way in.

"Grandpa?" I cried.

Mama rushed past me to phone, speaking over her shoulder, "A limb fell on his foot while he and Papa were chopping the tree. I'm calling for an ambulance."

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That evening Grandpa came home with

his foot in a cast, and lay on the couch.

"Shall I read to you, Grandpa?" I asked. Every evening I read to him from my children's story Bible.

"A story? Hmm? Yes, that's just what I need to get my mind off Old Tilley Trouble's tree and my ankle. Where were we again?"

"Moses," I said. "The plagues. Remember?"

"Good old Moses!" Grandpa said. "He sure outsmarted Pharaoh with the power of God."

I read about Moses and his brother, Aaron, speaking to Pharaoh, and about how God shook up the Egyptians with the ten plagues. I ended in a grand finale, with my favorite line from the story. "Let my pumpkin go!"

Grandpa choked. Tears streamed down his cheeks.

I jumped up and ran to his side. "Does your ankle hurt that much?" I cried. But then I realized he was laughing.

"Got Old Tilley Trouble on your mind?" He chuckled.

"What do you mean?"

"Let my pumpkin go!" He laughed.

"I said that? Didn't I say, 'Let my people go'?"

"Pumpkin!" Grandpa chortled. "That's what you said."

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Through the rest of the summer "Let my pumpkin go!" rang in my mind as I watched my pumpkin grow marvelously on Old Tilley Trouble's property. Sometimes I shuddered to think how I nearly destroyed it, and how Old Tilley Trouble's tree nearly destroyed me.

School began. Each afternoon when I got off the bus, I ran to the fence and admired my-going-to-be-prize-pumpkin. Grandpa's words echoed in my mind: "Since you know Old Tilley Trouble's character, you can outwit her!"

But I still didn't have a plan. I only had the comfort of knowing Grandpa thought I could create one.

One Saturday in late October Mama dropped me off at the library while she went to the bank. "My grandfather reserved a book," I said to the librarian. "His name is Joshua Veil."

As the librarian looked for Grandpa's book, I noticed a poster on the bulletin board, which stated: "Win a Utility Trailer Load of Pumpkins."

"A trailer load?" I asked.

The librarian laughed, and said, "Guess how many jelly beans are in this bottle, and the trailer load of pumpkins is yours. My husband has a bumper crop this year. He can hardly give them away. So far twenty children have entered the contest. I don't know what their parents will say when the

Story/Nature



pumpkins are delivered. They'll probably die of shock!"

"Shock!" I whispered. Just like Pharaoh, I thought, when he got too much of everything during the ten plagues. "I'll guess!" I said. I wrote down my guess on a form and added my name and phone number.

"We'll phone you if you're the winner," the librarian said.

I waited six days.

On Friday after school the phone rang as I sat alone in the kitchen, sipping apple cider. I picked up the receiver. "Hello... I did? All right!... Drop them off at 19 Jackson Rd. Thanks!"

I woke up early on Saturday and played in the backyard. And waited. A car pulling a trailer, piled high with pumpkins, pulled into Old Tilley Trouble's driveway. A man and boy got out of the car. The man knocked on Old Tilley Trouble's door. She didn't answer.

I held my breath.

The man looked at a sheet of paper in his hand, and said, "This is the address. Let's go ahead and unload. I'm sure it's all right." When the trailer was empty, the man and boy climbed into their car.

Just as they drove away, Old Tilley Trouble came outside. "What are you doing?" She yelled. "Stop! I didn't order all these pumpkins!"

Ducking down, I crept closer to the fence. "A plague of pumpkins!" I chuckled.

I stood up to get a better view, to see if things would work out as I hoped they would.

Suddenly, Old Tilley Trouble turned and spotted me. "Why are you grinning?" She screamed. "Did you do this?"

For a second, I stood like a speechless statue. Old Tilley Trouble's angry face terrified me. What had I gotten myself into? I turned and ran to my house.

But she called after me, "Get your pumpkin out of here! I never want to see your pumpkin again!"

The next Saturday I took my pumpkin to the County Fair. It didn't win first prize like I had hoped it would, but it won second prize. When the judge presented the red ribbon to me, Grandpa beamed at me.

Afterward he said, "Jaclyn, I've got to show you something." I followed him to another section of the fair where vendors had set up tables. He pointed across the room at Old Tilley Trouble busily selling her homemade pumpkin pies.

He chuckled, "Remember what I said about her character?"

"Greedy and stubborn," I answered. "I guess she got over the shock."

"Come on," Grandpa said.

"I don't want to talk to her!" I protested. Reluctantly I followed him to Old Tilley Trouble's table.

"You're going to eat some of the fruit of your labor," he said emphatically. "If it wasn't for you, she wouldn't have this goldmine of pumpkin pies!"

At the table, he pointed at the largest pumpkin pie. "I'll take that one," he said, and he handed Old Tilley Trouble five dollars.

Old Tilley Trouble shot Grandpa a look so mean and cold, I thought she was going to refuse to sell us a pie. But she looked at that five dollar bill, long and hard. Then she handed Grandpa the smallest pie on the table.

"Oh no, you don't!" Grandpa said. "Jaclyn deserves that one!" He grabbed the largest pie. Then he turned to me, and said "Tell me again, Jaclyn, what was it Moses said?" His eyes twinkled.

"Let my pumpkin go!" I answered quietly, not wanting Old Tilley Trouble's wrath to turn on me again.

"I'm a little deaf," Grandpa said, as he winked at me. "Did you say 'Let my pumpkin go!'" he shouted.

I nodded.

Old Tilley Trouble glared at us.

"That's what I thought you said!" Grandpa laughed. "Come on! Let's go home and have some pie."

SEEDS

Christopher de Vinck

I do not know if we are being watched, or if we are the ones gawking at life like naive spectators.

This past winter, my wife and I decided to set up a bird feeder, buy seeds and suet bars. I bought what looked like a small Victorian house that is capable of holding a pound of birdseed at one time. A slot on each four sides at the base of the house allows the seeds to filter out as the birds sit on a perch.

Wrens, starlings, cardinals, blue jays, finches, turtle doves, chickadees, red-headed woodpeckers, all of National Geographic quickly discovered our bird feeder. An added bonus was the arrival of the rabbits and chipmunks that ate the seeds on the ground that fell from the little house on a string. The squirrels are there too, as always, frustrated that we bought the cylindrical baffle that prevents the squirrels from climbing up the pole to the waiting warehouse of seeds.

Yesterday, I noticed, once again, that the bird feeder was nearly empty. The birds and company were feasting at the last bits of food, so I walked to the closet, opened the door, leaned over and dragged out the tin canister. As I opened the back door, everything disappeared. The birds flew off in one, quick rush of activity. The chipmunk zigzagged and evaporated into the pachysandra. By the time I reached the empty bird feeder, I was alone, or so I thought.

As I poured the birdseed into the open slot at the top of the little house, I had a sudden realization: I was being watched. The rhododendron branches moved slightly. There was a little rustling sound in the pachysandra. After I hooked the bird feeder back onto the black pole, I walked into the house and stood at the kitchen window waiting to see how long it took for the birds, rabbits, chipmunks and squirrels to return. Seconds.

"He's gone," the sparrow must have said with certitude. It seemed as if suddenly every creature knew that the intermission was over, and they could return to the stage. The downy woodpecker swooped in, hooked its claws onto the grating which held the suet bar and began hammering away. A blue jay bullied its way to the perch, rocked its beak back and forth into the seeds, selecting just a sunflower. The seeds that rained to the ground, bounced off the head of the chipmunk. The brown rabbit ran out from under the deck, found a spot where the seeds were plentiful, and began chewing, and twitching.

They were watching me. "Will he add more seed? When will he leave?" This is how a conductor might feel, or a boxer, senator, or movie star. Well, I suddenly felt powerful. I picked up my can of seeds and I walked out onto the deck again. All the animals quickly scattered back into their hiding places. I walked back into the house, and watched. A turtle dove fluttered down and nearly bounced to the ground and quickly began to peck at the seeds. Within seconds, everything once again

returned: rabbit, birds, chipmunks.

I stepped back onto the deck. They all disappeared. I stood there, trying to see into the dark bushes, trying to find a bird sitting in the oak tree.



I walked back and forth into the house and out onto the deck at least fifteen times, and each time, the birds and squirrels and friends ran off, watched me from their hideouts, then returned once I was safely inside the house.

One last time I stepped out onto the deck, this time with my canister of seeds. I flipped off the lid, dug my two hands deep inside and scooped out handfuls and just tossed the seeds up into the air like confetti. I picked up the canister and flung much of the seeds to the ground surrounding the bird feeder. I felt like flapping my arms and flying up to the top of the oak tree, zoom around the yard, peck at the freshly sown seeds, turn my head like the rabbit, wrinkle my nose, scratched the ground. But I was being watched. A man has to act like a man: raking the grass, driving to work, sleeping in his house without a perch. I grabbed the tin canister one more time and dumped the remaining seeds in one, wide sweep across the yard.

As I stood inside the house and watched through the kitchen window, nothing happened for the longest time. The wren probably thought "That was peculiar. No way for a man to act." The blue jay might have considered the seeds were tainted somehow. "Why would a man fling all that good seed around the yard in such a flourish?"

Fifteen minutes later, a single starling appeared on the grass and began eating the scattered seeds. Within twenty minutes the yard was filled with 20 or 30 birds, a rabbit, four chipmunks, eight squirrels. They found seeds, seeds and more seeds.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 852 million people across the world are hungry. Stated in the United Nations Development Program, 1.2 billion people currently live below the international poverty line, earning less than \$1 per day.

I do not know what I am doing as a man. Water gushes out of eight different spigots in my house at a simple twist of the wrist. My refrigerator is filled with fat grapes, and oranges, frozen shrimp, milk, eggs, butter. The cupboards and drawers are stuffed with pasta, bread, sauce, tuna, soup.

Poor nutrition and calorie deficiencies cause nearly one in three people to die prematurely or have disabilities, according to the World Health Organization.

I wrote on the grocery list attached to the humming refrigerator, "birdseed," and walked away.

Why is it that at my house the milk is fresh, and the birds are fat?

Ecclesiastes

The very heart of our being is spoiled by envy

A. A. van Ruler

*And I saw that all labor and all achievement
spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too
is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.
The fool folds his hands
and ruins himself.
Better one handful with tranquility
than two handfuls with toil
and chasing after the wind.*

Ecclesiastes 4:4-6

Here another ingredient is added to the cocktail of the Preacher's reflections. His ongoing purpose is to demonstrate that human existence doesn't have very much content nor does it produce very many fruits.

In our reading thus far he has especially been elaborating this basic thought by pointing to the many injustices that happen on this earth and which often go unpunished for long periods of time. Here he adds into this bitter mix of injustice the potion of envy.

It is true, he says, people do many things. They exert themselves tremendously and even accomplish a great deal. This is also the best thing they can do. But in it all they are driven by envy.

One person keeps a close watch on the other. We do so involuntarily. We have been put here side by side; we live in a community.

This is a good thing. Imagine what it would be like to be here all by yourself. We probably couldn't take that, neither bodily nor psychologically. From this perspective, we can only affirm the goodness of human togetherness.

But one by-product of that togetherness is that we see each other and watch each other. If this were just a watching out for each other in order to stand by and help each other, that would of course be a good thing.

But it often seems as if the devil tinkers with our watching. An element of comparison enters into it. We begin to compare ourselves with others.

But that isn't the worst of it. Even worse is our tendency to think that the other person is somehow being favored over ourselves and therefore that he is more fortunate than we are.

That is a strange reaction. Often there is little basis for this notion. Appearances deceive. Ultimately, all we see of the other is his outside. Ourselves we see primarily from the inside. As a result, the other often appears to be happier, more fortunate than we feel.

That we see ourselves this way is simply a fact of life. We begin to feel sorry for ourselves, it makes us dissatisfied and we whine about life.

But it can also have the completely opposite effect. A person may begin to exert himself to get to the same level he believes the other person has reached. He competes. He wants to outdo the other person, and to

Detail from *The Cheat* by La Tour

do so he exerts great effort.

A great many of life's achievements, thus, depend on envy.

But the Preacher makes this observation not just about our labors. He discovers this to be the origin of all human achievements, all of our accomplishments. The whole of culture, the entire historical process depends on the envy of men, one by another. Much of our upbringing and education, our sports and economy, our arts and science is rooted in envy. Life is a noble competition among men.

The Preacher wouldn't deny that we could call it a noble competition. At any rate, it is hard to imagine how we'd overcome our innate lethargy, melancholy and despair without the stimulus of envy. This sort of competition keeps us all on our toes as a society.

The Preacher, however, puts all the emphasis on the other side of the coin. No matter how you look at it, envy is still envy. It has an unpleasant aura about it. Also something of the absurd.

If it is the root of our action, it is an infected and rotten root.

A person could also exert himself simply because he enjoys his work or because he wants to help his neighbor and build up the community or because he wants to serve his Creator.

The Preacher does not, I think, mean to say that all these good impulses are completely lacking in man. He just says: Take

a good look at man as he really is: then it's quite obvious that he exerts himself so tremendously and excels in order to outdo others – and in this way to keep the other at arms length. This is a fact of experience: "I saw," he says.

Hereby he displays a certain sensitivity for a purer kind of human existence, for he feels this to be a spoiled form of man's true being. There is something degrading about comparing yourself to an other, feeling yourself fall short, and then striving to surpass the other. Is it perhaps true that life is a war of all against all?

Is God, perhaps, even jealous of his creatures? Perhaps he can't tolerate their existence and the fact that they are creatures?

We know better, of course. God has willed us to be and he rejoices in the fact that we are – even in our otherness, our distinction from him.

As human beings ought we not to be imitators of God? We, too, ought to delight

not only in the fact that God exists and that he is God (and we are not), and also in the fact that others – our neighbors and our fellow men – exist and that they are different from us.

In fact, this joy is the very essence of being. When this joy in the other and in his otherness is displaced by envy, what results is an ontological decay; being itself is spoiled.

This ontological spoilation permeates everything – all of society and culture, the whole of our being and inwardness. Everything is spoiled by it. And a war of all against all does indeed ensue. Envy leads to strife, and strife leads to injustice and repression.

So his observations about envy fit in with his reasoned reflections on injustice. It is a profound examination of the terrible fact that one man does so much injustice to another. Thought through rightly, it becomes apparent that injustice issues from the fact that one person is jealous of another. The one who commits injustice thinks that his victim has more and is more than he himself. The victim, of course, does not see it that way. From his perspective injustice looks like a kind of madness.

The situation does sadden the Preacher deeply. Life is painful because of this jealousy. Should we therefore stop all our labors, since they spring forth from the root of jealousy? That is impossible, says the Preacher: "The fool folds his hands and ruins himself." (Vs. 5) But, then, he is a fool, consuming his own flesh.

No, the actions of man do not issue from sin; they issue from the act of creation. They are given him as part of his existence as a human being.

Therefore, no matter how spoiled the root of our actions have become, we must go on. Still, it is hard to stifle the complaint, "Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after wind." (Vs. 6)

Sin yearns for rest because its actions are so thoroughly sinful. Yet, it cannot find that rest because all genuine rest is not a rest from works but a rest in works.

True rest lies in the joy we find in our works. And the sinner cannot find this. This is why our condition as sinner is so deeply unsatisfying – yes, so utterly impossible.

Don't imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call "humble" nowadays: he won't be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who's always telling you that, of course, he's nobody. Probably all you'll think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him, it will be because you feel a bit envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He won't be thinking about himself at all. There I must stop. If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you're not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.

C. S. Lewis, *Christian Behavior*

Christian Living

French-fry oil fuels busses

Peter Zorzeila

The smell of hot fries from the chip wagon is always tempting. But if you are in Brampton that tempting smell is more likely to be bus exhaust. Brampton buses are running on biodiesel, diesel fuel that is made up in whole or in part from vegetable oil. It's safer, cleaner, and just happens to smell like French-fries.

And as the price of the fuel at the pumps continues to skyrocket, farmers are looking at biodiesel as a new market for traditional crops such as soybeans and canola.

The use of vegetable oil as fuel may seem like a huge leap from petroleum fuel, but the original diesel engine in 1898 actually ran on peanut oil, which was too costly for commercial use. Dr. Rudolf Diesel always intended his engine to use vegetable fuel. For making biodiesel, the oil is separated into glycerine (a valuable by-product for soap making and other uses), and methyl-esters, the chemical term for biodiesel. It can be used as-is, or mixed with petroleum diesel in any proportion (a 20% mix, called B20, is popular). Whatever the blend, it can be used as fuel in your diesel engine without modification. Biodiesel can be found at an increasing number of pumps (currently four in Ontario). Some enterprising individuals are making their own.

Biodiesel is renewable, biodegradable, and has a closed carbon-dioxide cycle (the plants take carbon dioxide out of the air, returning it when the fuel is burned - with fossil fuels, the removal happened too long ago to count). Biodiesel has almost no sulphur - the major cause of acid rain - or aromatic hydrocarbons, and with much lower particulate matter, the black cloud when accelerating is gone, and the exhaust even smells good.

Vegetable oil diesel costs more partly because its production is not subsidized. The cost of biodiesel depends on the market price of the vegetable oil, and B20 is currently running about 3.3-3.6 cents per litre more than regular diesel. Increased cost of production is offset by the reduced taxes: the biodiesel part of blended fuel is exempt from the 14.3 cents-per-litre Ontario fuel tax, and from the Federal excise tax of 4 cents-per-litre.

While the Ontario Government's Ministry of Agriculture and Food (which handles vegetable-based fuels) has no targets for biodiesel use, they did eliminate the fuel tax in 2002, and continue to fund research on biodiesel through the Alternative Renewable Fuels Research and Development Fund.

The Federal Government does have a target for biodiesel use: 500 million litres by 2010 (compared to 3.5 million litres of biodiesel in 2004). That's 2 million acres of canola for fuel - almost 20% of our annual crop. They have committed \$11.9 million to biodiesel initiatives over four years to support demonstration projects.

One project in Ontario to increase our capacity is Topia Energy's new biodiesel plant in Sudbury, which the Federal Government is providing \$2 million to help build. Topia will be processing the fuel from oil rather than seed, which means the canola and soybeans will have to be shipped to Windsor for crushing. Farmers in the Sudbury area currently grow 10-15,000 acres of soya and canola combined, not enough to warrant a crushing plant in Sudbury, so the plant will bring in oil from seed grown elsewhere in the province or from western provinces. The Sudbury plant will be able to process 20 million litres of biodiesel each year, requiring 80,000 acres of combined soybeans and canola.

One bus pass, please. And a large order of fries.

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Environmental stewardship: the case for sustainability

Last week, I started a reflection on environmental stewardship by focusing on the importance of trees. Yet every piece of our creation is part of an integrated whole. In Genesis 2: 15 we read "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Stewardship requires both use and care. God has given mankind the stewardship of his garden, and we will be accountable to him for our performance.

It is becoming abundantly clear today that the earth's resources are not limitless and that mankind is making a significant impact on these resources and much of it is negative. Is our rate of usage sustainable? Can we continue using up the earth's resources as we are today well into 2100? Resources like oil, water, clean air, fish in the sea, wild animals, minerals, forests, arable land, the ozone layer and even rain though abundant are not limitless. We cannot sustain an exploitative approach ignoring the replenishing cycles that God himself has established for all resources.

As a part-time farmer, I am glad to be a part of a group of Christian farmers that really takes stewardship seriously. Even though, as farmers, we might be short-sighted at times (too focused on the bottom line), for the most part the farmers I meet at Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) meetings are committed to doing what is best for the long-term viability of their land and farm. Mining the soil and exploiting its goodness in the short term is out! What is in, is a commitment to understanding and improving agricultural practices. It requires a stubborn commitment especially when the cost of good stewardship makes us less able to compete with today's increasingly large-scale, specialized approach to farming. Competition often favors farmers, in the short run, who exploit now and profit at the cost of the long-term viability or sustainability of the soil.

Scripture is clear that we need to think long-term. In the book of Leviticus we learn of God's requirement of Sabbath - a year of rest - for the land every seven years and a complete rest every 49 years - a jubilee (Lev. 25:1-12). Leaving land fallow was God's provision that helped the long-term stability or sustainability of the land. Through careful land stewardship, today's farmer ensures the long-term productivity of the soil by annually returning manure or growing a green manure crop and fallowing. Farmer stewards plan their crop rotations so that soil health is improved - not mined.

Sustainability of the earth has a cost that we should not ignore any longer.

In Luke 14:28 Jesus says: *Suppose one of you wants to build a tower, will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?*

The costs of the impact of mankind on the resources of our planet as well as the long-term impact on our health and livelihood are being exposed in ever more frightening terms. The depletion of oil and fresh water and the effects of global warming and acid rain are some very obvious signs of our impact. The demands of our Euro-North American consumptive lifestyle on the earth's resources are not sustainable in the long-term. This is not new - yet how many of us don't understand or appreciate what the Kyoto protocol is trying to do. It's not perfect and it's only a start, yet many of us choose to do the ostrich-thing - or we take on the attitude not in my backyard or my lifetime!

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

A better way is to be like the person in Jesus' example. We all need to think ahead for the long-term. What are the long-term costs of our decisions today? We need to be thinking beyond the economics. Instead of "Can I afford it?" we need ask "Can the earth afford me doing this or buying this?" The long time viability or sustainability of the earth's resources demands that we take our stewardship seriously. In the large scale we need to be cutting back on non-renewable energy consumption, pushing back the deserts, planting trees, scale back the denuding of the earth of forests and reduce the long distances between supply and demand (made possible by cheap energy and cheap labor in the developing world). On an individual scale and for our health's sake we need to, at minimum, walk more and drive less.

Consider how we tie up earthly resources that could be used for even greater purposes - kingdom purposes. Consider the resources we tie up to build large facilities for sport, recreation, entertainment and our pets. Do we need more tsunamis and Live 8 concerts to make us aware of the needs in this world? And let's not forget the need for bringing the gospel as we are commissioned in Matthew 28. A friend of mine working for another denomination lamented the fact that her church has billions of \$ tied up in valuable real estate (downtown old churches). These properties serve as the place of worship for a dwindling number of worshippers - and that contrasts with her awareness of the shortages in the mission work of her denomination. She envisions what could be done today if these assets were freed up for kingdom work.

What can we do today? We can start by doing more with less and recycling what we have. It will move us in the right direction for sustainability. We may even find it liberating after all: do you possess your possessions or do they possess you?

Stewardly Tip: In your buying decisions - think long-term. Think - do I really need this? Is the convenience worth the cost of tying up earth's resources? We tend to collect too much stuff that we only use once or twice. And when you do buy, think durability and whether or not at the end of its service life it is recyclable. Recycling makes sustainability possible.

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: What's a Steward?

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Church and the law

Christian morality and public law: three secular arguments (Part 2)

Albert Mohler

Secularism rests on three myths. The first is the myth of the secular state. Secularism is not a positive construct. By its very nature, something is secular only when it denies the existence of God. Here is where Professor Audi's definition begins to break down. One cannot be genuinely secular and be indifferent to the existence of God, because if God did exist, that would bring immediate demands upon society – obligations and prohibitions which society would not be able simply to ignore without admitting that it is only tacitly or operationally secular. A truly secular state must altogether deny the existence of God.

When states begin to effect laws and codify some morality, there is no way that can be purely secular.

In other words, this is a call for an absolutely secular state – the existence of which is a myth. Why? Because states must deal with fundamental questions. They must deal with questions concerning life and death, questions about human identity, ultimate questions about existence and meaning in the universe. But the moment a state begins to deal with those fundamental questions, it ceases to be secular, especially the way Robert Audi defines it even at the motivational level. When states begin to effect laws and codify some morality, there is no way that can be purely secular. Any question that addresses itself to the meaning of life and death, for example, must be considered in terms much larger than secular theory will allow. There is no truly secular state.

Second is the myth of a secular argument. No argument is truly irreducibly secular. Anyone who wants to make an argument about anything beyond procedure will have to deal with questions of meaning, morality, and value – questions that are larger than any individual human frame of reference. On issues like those, there are no arguments that are genuinely secular.

As a matter of fact, listen carefully to those who most seek to advocate purely secular arguments. On questions of meaning and mo-

ality, their arguments are themselves just as essentially religious as the "religious" arguments they reject. They may believe their claims are not religious, but they end up being religious precisely because they are anti-religious. Moreover, they attempt to set up their own version of God – their own idea of what is the ultimate good – in order to determine value.

Third is the myth of secular motivation. Motivation is an inherently complex issue, because none of us is fully aware of our own motivation. This is the problem with the circular reasoning of Robert Audi's principle of secular motivation. Audi expects people to disregard their beliefs about God in thinking about public policy, to decide what they would believe about a certain issue if they did not already believe in God.

But a human being can never know what he would believe if he were not motivated by what centrally motivates him. How can a person know that he would continue to advocate the same position if he no longer believed in God, or if belief in God were simply bracketed from the equation? Audi's position is simply unrealistic.

No human being will ever know himself so well that he can separate himself from his own motivations, even those who allow themselves the conceit of believing they are driven by a purely secular motivation. Furthermore, to move the focus of the national conversation from the objective content of an argument to its subjective motivation is to be no longer engaged in public policy discussions, but rather in some kind of communal therapy session.

There is no genuinely secular state, no secular argument, and no secular motivation, even among those who consider themselves secular. There is no neutrality. On questions as ultimate as the existence or non-existence of God, or the binding or non-binding character of his dictates and commands, or the objectivity or subjectivity of morality, or the absoluteness or non-absoluteness of truth, there are no mediating positions. There is no neutrality.



Friedrich Nietzsche - secular reason turned on itself

Insofar as the law deals with what is most important, it must deal with ultimate issues like these. The law certainly deals with some issues of mere procedure and with policies that are not inherently freighted with moral importance. Yet on these issues, we do not have intense public, civic controversies. America is not now in danger of being divided in two over parking policies in the nation's capital, but over the institution of marriage. Passions are not running high over how certain procedures in the tax code could be rewritten, but on questions of normative sexuality. The nation is not in ferment over questions about the federal budget, but over whether a human embryo is deserving of protection recognized as bearing the dignity of life.

...human life, in terms of its inherent dignity, is very difficult to define in purely pragmatic terms

To argue over issues like these is to argue at a level far above a secular plane. It is to argue at the level of moral ultimacy – some from one perspective, some from another, but none from a genuinely secular perspective.

Therefore, if Americans accept the argument that Christian moral arguments are forbidden entry into the public space, they have decided not only to violate the clear intention of the fram-

ers of the Constitution, not only to reject the inherited civilization that has brought us to this point, not only to redefine what it means to be a liberal democracy, but we have actually privileged one form of religious discourse over another. That is, they have privileged irreligious religious discourse over self-consciously religious discourse.

Furthermore, how can society deal with ultimate issues if the only people who are genuinely allowed into the discussion are those who believe there is nothing more ultimate than our own existence, our own communal negotiation of moral questions? If ever Americans reach such a point, they will have become a civilization not even remotely like the one established by their founders.

In every one of Robert Audi's principles, his precise concern is with laws that restrict human conduct. That is the heart of the issue. There is a libertarian philosophy behind this, a basic idea of the liberty of human conduct. Audi's suggestion is that any limitation on human conduct must be justified. This is the "justificatory principle" now discussed in law schools, which states that any restriction on human conduct must be socially mandated by the political process on purely secular grounds. But here again, there is a serious problem. Where can we find an adequate rationale for restricting human conduct on purely secular grounds?

Most people would agree that murder, for example, is inherently wrong. But why? Once the issue is pressed hard enough, the purely secular theorist has very little ground for argumentation. The question "why" eventually presses the secular argument back to its irreducibly and essentially unsecular form. Why is murder wrong?

Some might try to fashion an answer to this question on the grounds of pragmatism. Not only William James and John Dewey, but also Stanley Fish, Richard Rorty, and others, have argued that all issues of ultimacy must be adjudicated on pragmatic grounds. However, the problem is that human life, in terms of its inherent dignity, is very difficult to define in purely pragmatic terms.

For instance, when does human life begin? As Christians, we have a principled, axiomatic answer to that question. But how does a putatively secular theorist fashion an answer to that question? His first instinct, of course, will be to let science step in and adjudicate the issue. But science cannot answer that question, because in order to say when human life begins, there must be some definition of what human life is, and that definition is precisely what science cannot offer. Because of that, there is no consensus among secularists about the definition of human life.

There is an entire spectrum among them about what human life should be, how it should be defined, when it begins, and when it is worthy of protection. There are secularists who hold that life begins at conception, and there are other secularists like Peter Singer who would argue that even infanticide should not be considered immoral. After all, a woman's right to choose is inviolable, and life, Singer says, is not worthy of protection until the human being has attained the ability to relate and use language.

Singer's conclusions may be distasteful – at least for now – to the secular aesthetic, but according to a purely secular rationale, can we really say he is wrong? He may be embarrassing according to secular politics, but according to a purely secular moral evaluation, he cannot be said to be wrong. This inevitable moral fog is the fatal problem faced by those who try to approach ultimate questions with a purely secular worldview.



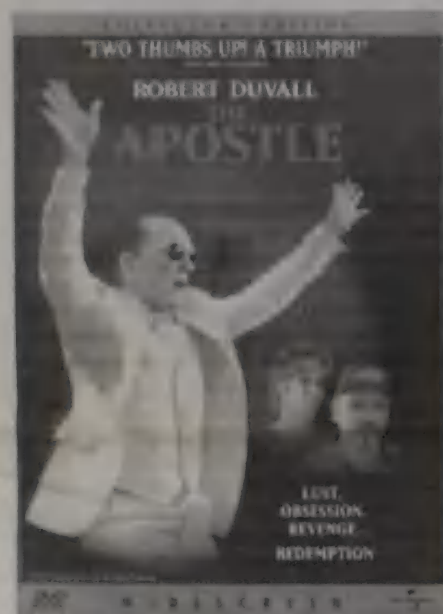
R. Albert Mohler, Jr. is president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. For more articles and resources by Dr. Mohler, go to www.albertmohler.com.

Pastoral excellence

Competency for communal leadership

James C. Dekker

In a provocative discussion on "competencies," the CRCNA's Leadership Development Team claims we "should not overstate the distinction between character and competence" (*Leadership: A Working Definition*, pp. 15-16). While it then goes on to list some learnable skills - listening, understanding group and system dynamics within congregations - the echo of competency rooted in character sounds often.



Character compromising competency

The film *The Apostle* shows church leadership in which lack of character compromised competence. Writer-director Robert Duvall plays gifted, but volatile "Apostle E.F.," preacher of a large Pentecostal congregation. After discovering his wife's adultery with the youth pastor, he drinks himself full of bravado at his son's little league game, then confronts and fatally bats his young colleague in the head. After faking his own death and baptizing himself, the wayward "Apostle" starts a new church that builds a daring ministry of racial reconciliation - though he always steals some of Jesus' limelight. E.F.'s sins find him out when his wife recognizes his voice on a radio broadcast and calls police, who arrest E.F. as evening worship ends.

Apostle E.F. was surely saved by grace and hugely competent, but did his violent character change? Or merely his behavior? God works wonders with jars of clay. Yet competence must be built on character or crackpot leaders will give Jesus and his church a bad name.

What's more, effective church leadership must multiply - itself a crucial competency - and not be pastor-centric, as both of E.F.'s congregations were. Not only movies, but

real church stories are full of talented and flawed lone ranger leaders - pastors and laypersons - who hit a breaking point, collapse in exhaustion or, worse, in moral failure, sullied much of past accomplishments. Do the names Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart ring any bells? Let it not be so among us.

Character complementing competency

Exodus 18 presents a hopeful report of community leadership development from the young nation of Israel. (Thanks to Ben Vanderzande of Christian Reformed Home Missions for first teaching me and many others this "Jethro Principle.") In the Sinai desert, Israel has begun nation-building after fleeing Egypt. Moses - himself a flawed, but forgiven and proven leader - oozes competence and confidence, bragging to father-in-law Jethro all the splendid things he and Israel have accomplished. "Terrific," says Jethro, "let's praise Yahweh and celebrate with sacrifices and a meal."

Next day, though, Moses spends all day "judging" people's complaints and problems. His work makes a difference, requiring varied competencies; Moses seems up to the job. Old hand Jethro, though, sees a trap that Moses misses as he steams by with youthful (he's only 80 at this time!) adrenaline flowing. Here's a paraphrase of Moses' and Jethro's conversation:

Jethro: "Why are you alone judging?"

Moses: "Because the people come to me."

Jethro: "Not good. You work like this, you burn out. You're the people's representative before God. Build a team of representatives."

Leaders, *listen up!* Moses is a representative - not the main feature. Jethro's words sound a fair warning for all church leaders - pastors, home-grown deacons, elders, small-group leaders, and teachers. Leadership must be expansive, not the turf of one person or group, no matter how gifted. If leaders monopolize tasks and programs, doing what they should train others to do, they stifle potential leaders and exhaust themselves to boot. How many churches have lost potential leaders, who then developed their gifts more (use)fully - not always in other churches?

Highview CRC's eager competence

In previous articles we conflated stories from several churches into a fictitious congregation to exemplify one leadership trait. Today we look at "Highview CRC."

Its first pastor moved after eight fruitful years in the young congregation. This pastor with a decade of mission experience led the congregation from 200 to 300 members,

urging them to develop personal and communal identity as hospitable evangelists. Highview called its next pastor precisely to "take our congregation the next step" to deliberate outreach in a neighborhood virtually untouched by churches.

An enthusiastic Council began working with the new pastor to implement the congregation's vision and mission articulated in a 75-page binder. The pastor warned that this vision looked like a deceptively beautiful mountain in the distance. If the congregation truly wanted to climb that mountain, they had to negotiate unseen but risky rocks and crevasses of old habits and attitudes. Such hazards could trip the best-intentioned climbers. Yet key lay leaders emphasized again and again, "We don't want this binder gathering dust. We believe God wants us to follow this route."

Some goals seemed bound to create friction: "Focus on community outreach." "Develop internal unity using historic creeds." Yet the pastor believed that using Reformed creeds would help, not hinder, evangelism. An engaging preacher and competent teacher, he developed with Council approval a plan for both afternoon worship and monthly Council devotions. Thus for five years congregation and leaders worked systematically through the *Heidelberg Catechism*, *Canons of Dort* (mercifully in just five lessons) and *Belgic Confession*.

Congregational response was enthusiastic. In the first year of the pastor's tenure - and with no work by the pastor - Highview bought an old school, outfitting it for worship and education. Within two years, the congregation rented rooms and offices at bargain rates to such community organizations as neighborhood police, family resource centre, youth orchestra and a counselling service. After three years, Council authorized a review and update of vision and mission. An inter-generational committee presented the revision four months later. Highview kept growing with several adult baptisms and 15 to 20 professions of faith annually, plus transfers-in of newcomers.

The pastor's competencies were meshing energetically with the official leadership and congregational goals. Better yet, Highview was developing "bench strength," with retiring council and committee member helping replacements assume tasks and leadership - without butting in after leaving.

Highview's character limited its competencies

Yet, after seven years two seemingly unrelated issues converged, and Highview plateaued. First, two key Council members moved for work reasons within two years of each other. These trusted leaders left a vacuum not immediately noticeable. As home-grown leaders who kept dust off the binder, they regularly mustered unity and courage to change among members who



would not readily follow the imported pastor. These people understood and managed community dynamics with great conviction and principle. Even after they left, Highview continued vigorous outreach - as long as the rest of the close-knit community remained stable.

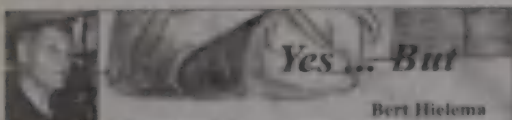
Second, the bane of Christ's church attacked the Reformed community. The mother congregation suffered a split. Highview had never fully established an identity apart from the mother church. Thus, after the split, a sizeable number of Highview members wanted to stop mountain climbing. They lost the courage needed to continue their moderate worship and outreach innovations, fearing painful - if unfair - criticism from family and community members in both mother and separated congregations.

Here again, character and competence in leadership converged - distinguishable, but inseparable. The fragile, mysterious "right stuff" needed to steer a fearful congregation past rocks and crevasses of community pressure vanished after two key families moved. Other influential council members embraced the new fear and helped Highview stall part way up the beautiful, risky mountain.

Where will Highview and similar churches go after losing leaders or succumbing to real, if illegitimate community pressures? No vision and mission statement and no competent individual leader can keep the climb going. For that to happen, churches need a providential confluence of leaders, congregation, time and opportunity - which we will consider next.

James C. Dekker, pastor of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, has climbed two or three of the Rockies' less daunting mountains, but prefers cycling - if not Sea-to-Sea, at least from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie.

Opinion



Why I don't like Bush

OK, this is definitely the last time that I will devote a column to the current US president. After this I promise, I will not single him out again. I want to explain why I have great difficulty calling him a brother in Christ.

I hope that some of the readers can explain to me where I am wrong. The bible tells me to love my neighbor, and, I love him in that sense, but the Bible doesn't tell me that I have to like a person. And, truthfully, I don't like George W. Bush.

And I am not alone. Most Canadians don't: 80 percent of our country men and women disagree with his Iraq invasion, as well as a growing number of Americans. If the Iraq war is proven to be based on deceit – and the Downing Street Memo proves that – 42 percent of Americans want Bush impeached.

If there ever were to come a sequel to *The March of Folly*, that Barbara Tuchman classic, it would certainly contain three chapters on Bush.

Folly Number One: The unnecessary Iraq War. It was supposed to be a cake walk. Now it's an insurmountable obstacle course with the America's volunteer military cracking under the strain of a war it was never designed to fight. Instead of hurting terror Iraq is causing it to flourish. A recent C.I.A. report warns that Iraq has become a magnet and training ground for Islamic extremists, who will eventually threaten other countries.

After 9/11 it would have made sense to concentrate solely on eliminating Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida's mountain redoubts and stabilize that country. Now Afghanistan is again a threat, with scores of US soldiers killed, while its army is overextended in Iraq, making major combat operations elsewhere impossible.

Folly Number Two. Take Bush's financial strategy, a "don't tax the rich, spend profusely on killing equipment, while short-changing the poor" policy. Charity begins at home, then spreads abroad, witness Scandinavia and the Netherlands, where poverty is no more and foreign help the highest. G8 take note.

Bush's money ways have caused America's budget surpluses to plunge into the red, with China supplying the loans. Now China wants to buy an American Oil company. Its largest oil company, CNOOC, has launched a \$18 (US) billion bid for one of the US's juiciest oil companies, Unocal. The world's two biggest continental

economies are entering a new era: who will control increasingly scarce oil.

We are witnessing the first phase of the Last Battle, the ultimate war for oil, the life blood of the global economy. China wants Unocal's oil reserves, knowing that today's \$60 a barrel oil price is the start of a rapid rise in oil prices. It's got the White House over the barrel. If the borrower balks, and vetoes Unocal's sale, China can trigger a financial crisis in the U.S. by pulling its \$685 billion out of the American market.

America can't afford to become more indebted while floating a costly war in Iraq and figuring out how to pay for Social Security and rising health-care costs. More about China later. Its economy has serious flaws.

Folly Number Three. Global Warming, also on this week's G8 agenda. By now we have had the hottest June on record, and the warmest part of the year is yet to come. About a month ago the *New York Times* had an interesting article on Climate Issues, describing how a "Bush Official Minimized Greenhouse Gas Links." As happens with the Washington administration, it sometimes hires foxes to guard the chicken coop or as Rumsfeld did, fire a general who suggested that 500,000 troops were needed to secure Iraq.

So it's no surprise that a White House official who once led the oil industry's fight against limits on greenhouse gases was put in charge to edit government climate reports in order to play down links between such emissions and global warming. The *New York Times* showed his hand-written alterations, where he scratched entire sections and inserted his own visions of this global problem.

I consulted a grapho-analyst, a person who can detect certain character traits in handwriting. His writing shows that the man, Philip A. Cooney, is sharp, persistent to the point of being stubborn and also has a closed mind. Not unlike a certain person in a large mansion in Washington.

Cooney removed "Unless urgent action is taken, there will be a growing risk of adverse effects on economic development, human health and the natural environment, and of irreversible long-term changes to our climate and oceans." He also deleted that "our world is warming." Mr Cooney – now working for Exxon Corporation – crossed out an entire

section describing the projected reduction on mountain glaciers and snowpack. His handwriting there stated that this was "straying from research strategy into speculative findings/musing."

Let me tell you where I come from in the Climate Change issue. My favorite theologian is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the man who became a martyr for his faith in the dying days of World War II. In his 1932 essay, "Dem Reich Komme," which he wrote referring to the church of his day but which is equally applicable to today: "We have fallen into secularism. I mean pious, Christian secularism. Not the godliness of atheism or cultural bolshevism, but the Christian renunciation of God as the Lord of the earth."

That was before Ozone Depletion or Global Warming, both the result of sinful human action. I hope you understand where I come from in connection with the US president. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, what is folly. I wonder. Jim Wallis, the editor of SOJOURNERS, has written a book: *God's politics: Why the Right gets it wrong and the Left doesn't get it*. In it Jim Wallis points out that the Bible is full of instructions to rulers to do justice to the poor. In connection with the current administration he writes: "The cost of the deficit is increasingly borne by the poor. The budget projects a record \$427 billion deficit and promises to make tax cuts benefiting the wealthiest permanent. ...Cutting pro-work and pro-family supports for the less fortunate jeopardizes the common good. And this while defense spending rises again to \$419 billion." Not including extra spending for Iraq, I may add.

I believe that I and most Canadians have valid reasons not to like Bush. And China?

On June 30 I was at the St. Andrew's, Tweed, Strawberry Social and sat next to a lady who asked me whether I was 'the writer.' I, out of the blue, answered, 'No, I am the wronger.' I guess there is more than a grain of truth in my impromptu reply, because often writers of columns, and, perhaps I in particular, thrive on bad news.

A long time ago some enterprising fellow started a newspaper in which he only wanted to print good news. Not much of that around, I am afraid. The paper didn't go beyond a few editions.

So, is there good news? I can easily recall lots of bad news items, of

which this past week has had a belly full. In my personal life I have only reasons for rejoicing, but this column is not about me, but about the world and those who dwell therein. And I am afraid that we have too many earth-dwellers to accommodate everybody comfortably.

In fact Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute wrote a new book entitled *Outgrowing the Earth*. In it he presents a dire picture of declining food supply from rising temperatures and rapid depletion of water resources around the world. It draws particular attention to the decrease in grain stocks everywhere and to the increasingly desperate position of China, where water tables are falling and deserts expanding.

Much of China's water comes from fossil aquifers which dry up sooner or later. In China it's sooner. It used to be that seventy percent of its water supply was used for crop irrigation, with only twenty percent reserved for industry and ten percent for residential use. Now in the competition for scarce water, China's cities and industries get first claim – leaving farmers with a shrinking share of a shrinking supply meaning shrinking crops. To produce either a ton of wheat or steel, 1000 tons of water are needed. Steel is the evident winner.

And city dwellers? I have a son-in-law who often travels to China to give lectures. He told me that some new apartment buildings have no water connection. That's one way of curtailing water use. A bit drastic I must admit. If it is that bad for urbanites, imagine what the rural rest – the bulk of the population – must endure.

This year is especially crucial for China. Its wheat belt, northern China, is experiencing an intense heat wave. Its largest city, Beijing, the site of the 2008 Olympics, is situated there, soaking up more water than ever in the sweltering temperatures, while the limits of electricity use are tested everywhere. In China's south, more than 1,000 people have drowned and millions have been affected by floods.

With crops withering in the fields, rumor has it that wheat will be in short supply this year. Usually tight-lipped, Chinese officials surprisingly admitted that a shortfall of at least 20 million tons this year was possible, blaming drought in many parts of China. As China goes, so goes the world. Not only has China too many mouths to feed, the entire world has that problem also, or will

have soon.

As yet we still have plenty, but once oil production declines, so will the world's population, because we eat oil. This week, officially, world citizen 6,500,000,000 will be born. Perhaps even in Ontario. That infant will face a world with fewer people, as food output is intrinsically tied to oil production. This could quite well mean that this newborn child will see the number of earth-dwellers fall to close to pre-Industrial Age levels – less than 2 billion – because both oil and water reservoirs are close to running on empty.

No wonder I called myself a 'wronger' rather than a 'writer'. It's interesting to watch the commodity futures. Some speculators have bought oil at \$80.00 per barrel for December. There have been steady increases in the price of corn, wheat and rice. In the past China's harvest shortfalls were covered by drawing down its once massive stocks of grain. These are now gone.

Since the bulk of the Chinese citizens are farmers, prone to revolt when matters go bad, the top governors must do everything in their power to keep them content. They know that the Communist revolution started with peasant discontent. So the Beijing bosses keep a close watch on the mood of the masses, and must now cover the imbalance with imports.

That makes for an interesting interplay. China's official grain deficiency is 20 million tons. Now the blistering weather in the wheat growing area may easily have doubled this shortfall. With Australia also experiencing a heat wave, and Canada's west suffering a cold and wet season, there is basically only one option left. China will end up buying in the US – which controls nearly half of the world grain exports.

How will this scenario play out? China has the money. The USA has the grain. Both want the world's oil. Who will blackmail who? The upshot is a real jump in cereal prices, also because an ever more prosperous world population consumes at a higher level, eating more meat and poultry, all requiring more grains. My sombre outlook, perhaps going against the grain, sees a real spike in food costs. Also because the world grain stocks are at their lowest level in 30 years, at a time when U.S. farmers too are losing irrigation water to aquifer depletion and to cities. We could well be "outgrowing the earth."

See hielema.ca for earlier columns.

News

A rape victim defies traditional code

Owais Tohid

ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN — When Mukhtaran Mai, a simple, uneducated peasant of a small village, was gang raped on the orders of a local council, her life was supposed to be over. In Pakistan's tribal and feudal culture, rape victims are usually ostracized. But Ms. Mai refused to back down, dedicating her life to social work and to changing attitudes about women.

"I had only three choices. Either to commit suicide by jumping in a well or shed tears all my life like any other victim in such cases. Or I could challenge the cruel feudal and tribal system and harsh attitudes of society," says Mai in a phone interview with the *Monitor*.

For three years, Mai has been fighting an uphill battle for justice against the culprits. She was scheduled to appear in Pakistan's Supreme Court to seek punishment for 12 men, including four alleged rapists. Lower courts put one of her attackers behind bars for life, but five other convicted men were freed on appeal because of a "lack of sufficient evidence."

Her case has garnered national and even international attention, thanks to her willingness to speak out both here and abroad. Concerned that she would tarnish the country's image, the government recently banned her from foreign travel, only to back off amid protests. But her greatest impact may be at home, where her boldness has helped change people's perceptions of rape victims, say rights activists.

"She has become a symbol of resistance and defiance in the country," says Farzana Bari, a leading women rights activist who has worked closely with Mai. "For the women's movement, her case is significant as she is showing the cruel face of a system which considers women as property."

The fate of 32-year-old Mai changed when she was allegedly raped by several men on the orders of a self-styled community justice council, known as a punchayat, in the Punjab village of Meerwala. The councils consist of tribal elders and influential feudal lords.

She was punished for no crime of her own. A rival clan went to the punchayat claiming that Mai's teenaged brother allegedly had a sexual relationship with a girl of their clan. Villagers say the boy was merely seen walking with



Mukhtaran Mai

the girl. The punchayat ordered that Mai be raped by the rival clan members to settle the score.

Mai says she shouted and screamed for help while she was dragged in front of hordes of villagers for rape. She walked back to her family house in front of the villagers, shivering, with tears in her eyes. But nobody came forward as a witness in her case.

Initially her parents refused to register a complaint with the police, saying it will bring dishonor to the family and disrepute to the tribe, an attitude no different from traditional practice. But they eventually agreed, due to Mai's commitment to fight.

"I pray to God to get justice as my victory will be the victory of suppressed and oppressed women," says Mai. "God forbid if I lose. Then it will be a defeat for everyone who believes in social justice."

When the case hit the headlines of national and international media, Mai became a celebrity and visited several countries in the West.

Using money she raised abroad, she now runs a primary school for girls and boys. Within two years, the enrollment increased to 350 and she plans to construct two more classrooms. The school's success shows that the villagers trust her, even to teach their kids the Koran.

"I want to see girls of peasants study and make their own identities rather than being caught in the vicious cycle of this feudal system," she says. "I am at peace whenever I see them studying."

Mai also lends a hand to other victimized women, to whom she has become a hero. Though she has helped embolden women in Pakistan, the fragile women's movement has a long road ahead. During seven months last year, 151 Pakistani women were gang-raped and 176 were murdered, victims of the centuries-old tribal custom of honor killings, according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

A fortnight ago, human rights activists had wanted Mai to go to the US to speak on the issue but the government took her passport and restricted Mai to her house. During a recent trip to New Zealand, President Pervez Musharraf reportedly said Mai was being taken to the US by foreign nongovernmental organizations "to bad-mouth Pakistan" over the "terrible state" of the nation's women. He said NGOs are "Westernized fringe elements" which are "as bad as the Islamic extremists."

Islamabad lifted the travel ban after protests from rights activists, international media, and perhaps

most significantly, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Mai, who has postponed her trip until after the court verdict, met with General Musharraf a couple of months ago.

"Someone must have tried to create a misunderstanding as he has always been kind to me," Mai says. "But how could he even think that I will bad-mouth Pakistan? I love my country as much he does. I could have sought asylum, but I belong to this country and the land belongs to me."

Mai acknowledges that the pressure on her is daunting at times. "Even some people in the

community taunt me, but I don't cry anymore. I only cry when the darkness hides my face. I curl up in my mother's lap but smile with sunrise with more vigor and courage," she says.

Mai wants to get married and she says lots of men have proposed to her. "But they seem to be interested more in money. I could see dollars flashing in their eyes. I tell them if you want to marry me then live with me in the village and serve people. Then they don't return," she says, smiling.

Owais Tohid is a correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor

Sri Lanka: The Politics of Conversion

Sarah Page

DUBLIN (Compass) — Anti-conversion laws are once again on the agenda in Sri Lanka after a fall-out in parliament that left President Chandrika Kumaratunga desperately in need of Buddhist support.

Two separate anti-conversion bills proposed by the Minister of Buddhist Affairs and the Buddhist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) party had been put on hold as the government turned to more pressing issues in the aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami.

The Tamil community had complained about tsunami relief funds not reaching northern Sri Lanka, an area still held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The LTTE began fighting for an independent Tamil homeland in 1983. A ceasefire signed in 2002 established an uneasy peace, but tensions were still evident when Kumaratunga proposed a joint deal with the rebels to distribute tsunami relief funds in devastated northern coastal areas.

The plan met with determined protests from the Sinhala Buddhist majority in the south. On June 13, police used tear gas and batons to break up a protest by Buddhist monks, according to a BBC report. Several other major demonstrations were held in the capital, Colombo.

Undeterred, Kumaratunga signed the "Joint Mechanism" agreement with LTTE leaders on June 24.

Many church leaders welcomed the move, seeing it as an opportunity to revisit the stalled peace process.

Buddhist leaders, however, were incensed. Monks from the

JHU party announced a "fast unto death" unless the government revoked the agreement. In solidarity with the protestors, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) Party resigned from the ruling coalition, leaving Kumaratunga with a minority government.

The JVP had sided with the JHU in pushing forward anti-conversion legislation.

Days after the "Joint Mechanism" was signed, the Minister of Buddhist Affairs proposed the Act for the Protection of Religious Freedom, which appeared in the Government Gazette.

Once the Gazette publishes a bill, it can be placed on the Parliamentary Order Paper and presented for voting.

Wickremarajapakse's Act is an alternative to the Bill for the Prohibition of Forcible Conversion proposed by the JHU. The JHU bill was "Gazetted" in May and referred to a sub-committee for discussion and possible amendments.

A previous draft of the Act for the Protection of Religious Freedom called for imprisonment of up to five years and a maximum fine of 100,000 rupees (\$998) for anyone found guilty of unethical conversions.

Key representatives of the Sri Lankan Christian community (who requested anonymity) said the renewed emphasis on anti-conversion legislation could be an attempt to appease the Buddhist community in the wake of the LTTE agreement.

Asma Jahangir, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Religion or Belief, paid

a brief visit to Sri Lanka in May to meet with representatives from Buddhist, Hindu and Christian communities. Anti-conversion laws were a key issue on her agenda.

At a press conference in Colombo on May 12, Jahangir said she had seen no solid evidence of forced conversions. "In my opinion, the provisions of both draft bills could result in the persecution of religious minorities rather than protection and promotion of religious tolerance," she told reporters.

The Joint Committee of Buddhist Organizations in Sri Lanka immediately wrote a letter of protest to the United Nations, claiming it had provided ample evidence of forced conversions in its meeting with Jahangir on May 3. The letter, published in the *Asian Tribune* on June 6, stated, "We regret very much that Madam Jahangir has exhibited apparent bias towards forces operating against the interests of Buddhists and Hindus who constitute over 80 percent of the country's population."

The letter concluded, "We fear that if the introduction of legislation is delayed and those responsible for the attacks on Buddhist places of worship are not identified, the tolerant Buddhist masses may run out of patience and adopt extra-legal methods to protect their cultural heritage, and the freedom of thought, conscience and religion..."

Meanwhile, attacks on Christian communities have continued since Jahangir's visit. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka has recorded several violent attacks on churches, including arson attempts, in recent weeks.

Classifieds

Classified Rates		Anniversaries	
<p>DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION <i>Christian Courier</i> is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.</p> <p>RATES (GST added to all rates listed) All personal and family announcements \$16.00 per column inch (P.I.) (2" wide) rose@christiancourier.ca Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: \$18.20 P.I. ads@christiancourier.ca</p> <p>PHOTOS There is a processing fee of \$25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged P.I., but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. Please note that we cannot use a faxed photo. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.</p> <p>PERSONAL ADS <i>Christian Courier</i> would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. The cost to set up a personal file under a unique file number is \$25. Ads requesting correspondence with this file are run at \$16 P.I. per insertion. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened.</p> <p>NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS We offer a \$25 one-year subscription to couples whose wedding is announced in <i>Christian Courier</i> and to parents who announce a child's birth in our paper. If you want to take advantage of this offer, please let us know when placing your ad.</p> <p>SUBMITTING YOUR AD Mail: <i>Christian Courier</i> 1 Hiscott St. St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7 fax: 905-682-8313 e-mail: ads@christiancourier.ca</p> <p>OTHER INFORMATION <i>Christian Courier</i> reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style. Please provide us with clear copy. <i>Christian Courier</i> is not responsible for any errors due to hand-written or phoned-in advertisements.</p>		<p>Anniversaries</p> <p>1955 August 13 2005 Clarkson, Ontario Acton, Ontario</p> <p><i>My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Psalm 121:2</i></p> <p>With praise and thanksgiving to our Lord above, we joyfully announce the upcoming 50th Wedding Anniversary of our parents and grandparents</p>  <p>BERT AND LIENKE VANDERLAAN (nee Hofman)</p> <p><i>We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 1:3</i></p> <p>We pray that the blessings of the Lord who brings love, joy and health may follow you all the days of your life.</p> <p>With love and congratulations from: Paul & Ann Adema, Acton, ON Robert & Tina Parent Rob & Susan Vanderlaan, Rockwood, ON Kristin, Carly and Luke Henry & Karen DeVries, Guelph, ON Terrance, Danielle and Sarah Terry & Sue Vanderlaan (1985)</p> <p>In celebration, there will be an Open House for family and friends on Saturday, August 13, 2005 from 2 to 5 p.m. at their home: 265 Peel Street, Acton, Ontario L7J 1M7 Please feel free to join us. <i>Best wishes only please.</i></p>	
<p>Personals</p> <p>Widower, 69, seeks companion for helping each other in continuing to live for Christ.</p>  <p>Reply to Box #2748 1 Hiscott St. St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7</p>		<p>1955 August 11 2005</p> <p>With praise and thanksgiving to the Lord we celebrate with our parents</p> <p>WILLIAM AND MYNTJE HARBERS (nee Voorneveld)</p> <p>their 50th Wedding Anniversary</p> <p>We pray the Lord will continue to keep you in his loving arms. With love from your children and grandchildren.</p> <p>Willy Harbers, Nepean, Ont. Wilma & Bill Tibben, Brinston, Ont. Heidi & Jason Crawford, Toronto, Ont. Marcia & Ry Parikh, Siggelkow, Minneapolis MN Glen Paul & Hans Schuler, Chesterville, Ont. Daniel Erin & Brian Geertsema, Carp, Ont. Emily & Martin Geertsema, Kinburn, Ont. Betty & Paul Dentz, Iroquois, Ont. Sally Jane, Jenny Albert & Linda Harbers, Brinston, Ont. Rob, Andrew, Eric, James, Corrin Brian & Joy Harbers, Williamsburg, Ont. Matthew, Sherry-Lynne</p> <p>You are invited to attend an Open House Sat Aug. 6, 2 - 4 p.m. at Community Christian Reformed Church Dixon Corners, Ontario</p> <p>Home address: 4108 Carmen Rd/City Rd 1 RR 1 Brinston ON K0E 1C0</p> 	
<p>For Rent</p> <p>Home with 3 bedrooms - large lot, near bus routes. Richmond Hill area Phone 905-881-4317</p> <p>2 bedrooms, large walkout base- ment apartment near Waterdown. 4 appliances, non-smoker/pets. Available July 1. \$750 utilities incl. Call: 905-890-3231 cell: 905-877-8595</p> <p>Guelph - Middle class raised bungalow with in-law suite on quiet crescent in West end of Guelph \$1400 519-338-3920</p> <p>APARTMENT FOR RENT above the Verstraete travel office in St. Catharines. Please contact Ria at 905 934 4414</p>		<p>July 31</p> <p>Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. J. Kuntz will be preaching.</p> <p>QUINTE CHRISTIAN RETIREMENT HOMES</p>  <p>For Sale: One Bedroom Unit in luxury senior residential, 2 level complex in Trenton, Ontario. Price: \$130,000.00 Features included: 5 appliances, security entrance, central air, covered balcony, radiant in-floor heat, lower level common room and workshop.</p> <p>Call: (613) 392-8967 or (613) 967-7345 or (613) 394-2369 MLS# 2053527</p> <p>For Sale</p> <p>Ruby model in Phase 2 of WELLINGSTONE CHRISTIAN HOMES in Hamilton.</p> <p>Please call (905) 389-1679 after 6 p.m. for information.</p> <p>The Ruby has 894 square feet of space consisting of kitchen, living room, master bedroom with a walk- in closet and a second bedroom with a smaller closet. The Ruby also has a balcony/patio and a storage area.</p>  <p>For pictures of a Wellingsstone Homes and model suite, visit: www.wellingsstone.ca</p>	



September 2, 1955

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 (nee Vellenga)

 Praise the Lord for 50 years of faithfulness
 to our parents.

Their children:

 George & Sue Couperus
 Sid & Sue Couperus
 Stuart & Hannelita Couperus
 John & Annette Brinkman
 Along with 21 grandchildren &
 2 great-grandchildren

 There will be an **Open House** at their home
 on August 28, 2:00 to 4:00 P.M.
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JULY 25, 2005

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Available for Call

The council of Bethel CRC of Lacombe, Alberta wishes to announce that after a year of sabbatical studies,

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is available for call.
Pastor Kirk can be reached at
13011 - 39th Street
Edmonton AB T5A 5A3
by email at
rational@telusplanet.net
or janetandkirk@msn.com
or by phone at (780) 456-5362

Job Opportunities

The youth of **SPRINGDALE CHRISTIAN
REFORMED CHURCH**
need a **youth pastor/director**.

Springdale CRC is a congregation committed to the Reformed faith, located 10 minutes west of Newmarket, Ontario. The successful candidate will possess abilities to provide leadership to the church's ministry program for teens and young adults, and will show a strong desire to build relational ministries within the youth.

Interested applicants are asked to call John Olthof of the Search Committee at **905-939-870** or email:

the_search_committee@hotmail.com
or fax # **905-939-9385**

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invites applicants for the position of a part-time

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This position may be filled on a contract basis.

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For more information please call George Van Kampen (Principal) at **905-648-6655**. Letter of application and resume should be emailed to gvankampen@hdch.org Application Deadline: August 1, 2005



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FIRST HAMILTON CRC

in downtown Hamilton

has openings for three part-time staffing positions.

- (1) **Pastor of Visitation:** The primary focus will be to the elderly and shut-ins of our congregation. Availability to conduct visitations during the day is preferred. This position is ideally suited for a retired ordained pastor.
- (2) **Visiting Preacher:** An ordained pastor is required to preach 18-24 times per year. Preference will be given to those who embrace the Reformed tradition and who are committed to the missional understanding of the church.
- (3) **Worship Coordinator:** This position involves planning & coordinating of our worship services. Knowledge of the Reformed theological tradition and familiarity with various music genres is required.

Each of these positions is for 1-2 years. Interested applicants should contact the church office at (905) 528-3826 or e-mail at office@firsthamilton.ca for a complete job description or further information.

The Back to God Hour

Announces the search for the following positions:

**DIRECTOR OF THE BACK TO GOD HOUR
ENGLISH LANGUAGE MINISTRY LEADER**

Suggestions of potential candidates and applications for either position should be submitted to

Back to God Hour Search Committee
Attn: Rev. Allen Petroelje, Chairman
203 Decker
Fremont MI 49412
alpetroelje@sbcglobal.net

Electronic filing is encouraged. Information regarding the positions can be obtained at www.btgh.org or www.crcna.org. Candidates are urged to submit applications by August 31, 2005. The committee will begin considering applications at that time. The search will continue until the positions are filled.

In keeping with the CRC Equal Opportunity Policy, persons who are members of a minority group or ethnic community are encouraged to apply.

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The story printed on pages 7 and 8, refers to
Here is the recipe

INGREDIENTS:

1 kg (winter) carrots
1 kg potatoes
500 grams onion
salt
pepper
butter



INSTRUCTIONS:

Peel the potatoes, onion & carrots and cut them in pieces. Cook in boiling water for about 1/2 hour (till the potatoes are soft). Strain the vegetables and mash till it looks like a puree. For taste, add salt, pepper and a little butter.

For variation: You can flavor the hutspot with ketjap manis or Sambal. You can also add your favorite sausage

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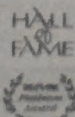
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Burns Lake - CFLD	9:15 am	1400
Osoyoos - CJOR	8:00 am	1490
Penticton - CKOR	8:00 am	800
Port Alberni - CJAV	7:00 pm	1240
Prince George - CIRX	7:00 am	94.3
Princeton - CHOR	8:00 am	1400
Smithers - CFBV	9:15 am	1230
Summerland - CHOR	8:00 am	1450
Vernon - CJIB	9:30 pm	94

ALBERTA

Brooks - CIBQ	8:30 am	1340
Ft. McMurray - CJOK	8:30 am	1230
High River - CHRB	6:30 pm	1140
Edmonton - CJCA	6:00 pm	930
Westlock - CPOK	7:30 am	1370

SASKATCHEWAN

Estevan - CJSL	8:00 am	1280
Weyburn - CFSL	8:00 am	1190

MANITOBA

Altona - CFAM	9:30 am	950
Steinbach - CHSM	9:30 am	1250
Winnipeg - CKJS	9:00 am	810

ONTARIO

Atikokan - CFAK	9:30 am	1240
Chatham - CFCO	6:30 am	630
Guelph - CJOY	8:30 am	1460
Hamilton - CHAM	7:30 am	820
Kapuskasing - CKAP	7:00 am	580
London - CKSL	7:00 am	1410
Oshawa - CKDO	8:00 am	1350
Owen Sound - CFOS	7:00 am	560
Pembroke - CHVR	10:00 am	96.7
Sarnia - CHOK	7:30 am	1070
Stratford - CJCS	8:45 am	1240
Tilsonburg - CKOT	9:02 am	101.3
Windsor - CKLW	7:30 am	800
Wingham - CKNX	10:30 am	920
Woodstock - CJFH	7:30 am	94.03

NEW BRUNSWICK

Saint John - CHSJ	9:00 am	94.1
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PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Charlottetown - CFCY	7:00 am	630
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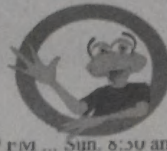
NOVA SCOTIA

Bridgewater - CKBW	7:30 am	1000
Digby - CKDY	6:00 am	1420
Halifax - CFDR	8:30 am	780
Liverpool - CKBW	7:30 am	94.5
Kentville - CKEN	8:30 am	1490
Middleton - CKAD	8:30 am	1350
New Glasgow - CKEC	7:30 am	1320
Shelburne - CKBW	7:30 am	93.1
Sydney - CJCB	7:00 am	1270
Weymouth - CKDY	8:30 am	103.1
Windsor - CFAB	8:30 am	1450

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High River/Calgary - CHRB	1140 AM	Sun. 4:30pm
Nordegg - CHBW	93.9 FM	Sun. 8:30 am
Rocky Mtn. House - CHBW	94.5 FM	Sun. 8:30 am

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Prince Rupert - CIAJ	100.7 FM	Sat. 10 am
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MANITOBA

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Steinbach - CHSM	1250 AM	Sun. 4 pm

NOVA SCOTIA

Bridgewater - CKBW	1000 AM	Sun. 5:30 am
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ONTARIO

Oshawa - CKDO	1350 AM	Sat. 8 am
Woodstock - CJFH	94.3 FM	Sat. 8 am

SASKATCHEWAN

Estevan - CJSL	1280 AM	Sun. 7 am
Weyburn - CJSL	1190 AM	Sun. 7 am

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 23 Wieringermeerdag, 10 a.m. at Queens Park Drive, Stratford. Potluck lunch. Phone 1-519-631-6234 for more information.

July 31 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. J. Kuntz will be preaching.

Oct 1 & 2 BETHEL CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH, Newmarket, Ontario. 50th anniversary weekend of celebration. Former member and friends invited. To obtain tickets to attend the Saturday dinner and for more information, call John VanLeeuwen at 905-775-0367 Ph., 905-775-8295 Fax, or jvanle0431@rogers.com. More details in following issues.

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Wieringermeerdag

July 23 10 a.m.

Potluck Lunch

Stratford

Queens Park Dr.

Phone

519-631-6234



TO OUR READERS

There will be 3 weeks to the
next issue date of August 15.
The staff of *Christian Courier*

— all three
of us
are taking
a break



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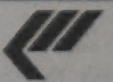
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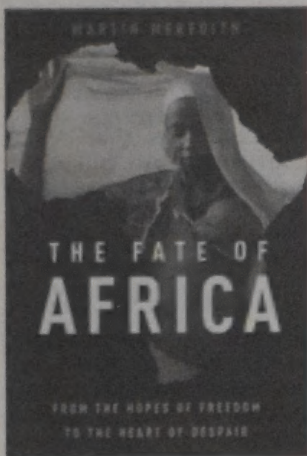
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Review/News

Continent of heartbreak

The struggle of independent Africa to find its way



The Fate of Africa

By Martin Meredith
PublicAffairs 752 pp., \$35

Reviewed by Marjorie Kehe

In March 1957, dignitaries from 56 countries – including Eisenhower, Nehru, Zhou En-lai, and Queen Elizabeth II – descended on Ghana for six days of festivities. At that moment, there seemed to be much to celebrate. Ghana was gaining its independence from Britain. Rich in cocoa, gold, timber, and bauxite, the infant nation seemed destined for a bright future. At its helm stood national hero Kwame Nkrumah.

This competent and well-educated man, a political-prisoner-turned-leader, charmed the global elite who surrounded him as the world arrived to fête his country. He opened the State Ball paired with the Duchess of Kent, employing dance steps taught him only hours earlier by Louis Armstrong's wife Lucille.

Such is the lively scene painted in the first chapter of *The Fate of Africa: From the Hopes of Freedom to the Heart of Despair* by veteran Africa observer Martin Meredith.

But by Chapter 15, it's the early 1970s, and Nkrumah – overthrown by his own military in 1966 – is a deluded and pathetic man living in exile in Guinea in a villa with a leaking roof. Ghana was by then on its way to utter impoverishment, with crime rates soaring, public services crumbling, and the educated classes in flight.

This month – between Live 8 concerts and the meeting of the G-8 leaders in Edinburgh – the world again turned its attention to Africa. But today there is less than ever to celebrate, according to Meredith.

"The Fate of Africa" is not an

easy book to read. Not because of its length – the pages actually turn quite easily as Meredith strides through a half century of the tumult of African independence – but rather because it tells of so much heartbreak.

Yet Meredith leaves readers little time to indulge in emotion. In a style that is broad rather than deep, his narrative rushes from country to country, determined to touch down in all corners of the continent.

He tells the stories of a generation of young nationalist leaders in Africa – Nkrumah in Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Léopold Senghor of Senegal, Haile Selassie in Ethiopia – and of their early successes and later failures.

The book explains the ways in which the different European colonizers either accepted and facilitated the emergence of the new nations (the British) or turned the separation into bitter and sometimes bloody struggles (the French and the Portuguese).

It chronicles the shocking excesses and even madness of some African leaders (Jean-Bedel Bokassa who spent \$22 million on his coronation as emperor of the Central African Republic) and the willingness of world leaders to overlook their worst practices. (Joseph Mobutu of Zaire, believed to have stolen an estimated \$5 billion from his crumbling nation, later warmly recalled his stay with the Bush family in Kennebunkport.)

Along the way are bits and pieces of stories that are alternately intriguing, surprising, and touching (Che Guevara writing in his journal after battling in the Congo: "This is the history of a failure"; Senghor's induction into the Académie française; Nelson Mandela, on trial, stating readiness to die for his dream of a free and democratic society).

Some readers, however, may be frustrated both by the book's rapid sweep and its unwillingness to offer solutions.

After years of reporting and writing on Africa first as a journalist and then as an academic, Meredith knows his territory. He is generous with numbers and statistics. He uses these – indices like gross domestic product figures, infant mortality rates, per capita income, literacy and school enrollment rates – to trace the decline of

African prospects from the 1960s down through the 1980s and, he argues, (with some exceptions) into an even bleaker period today.

But Meredith is neither a philosopher nor an ideologue. *The Fate of Africa* is not a book that attempts to rationalize the heartbreak he describes or to suggest an improved path for the future (other than to urge better governance).

It is rather a work that serves as a guide through events that many readers outside Africa may know best as headline fragments rather than as a cohesive history.

As such, it makes for fascinating – although constantly disturbing – reading. Often it would seem that the book's true theme is simply man's inhumanity to man.

Occasionally, Meredith relies on the words of others to spell this out. He quotes economist Arthur Lewis who wrote in a 1965 study of one-party states in West Africa: "Much of what is going on is fully explained in terms of the normal lust of human beings for power and money."

He also tells of *Monitor* staff writer Scott Peterson, who, while working as a reporter for *The Daily Telegraph* in London, listened to relief workers in the Sudan negotiate with gunmen to get food to the starving. Peterson later wrote, "There was no sense of community, no sense of easing a human crisis – just me and what goes into my pocket."

It's an observation that could be applied to so many of the African leaders Meredith writes of, as well as to the outsiders who plundered Africa for interests of their own.

There will undoubtedly be readers who will challenge Meredith's fairly relentless pessimism on his subject, and there will certainly be others who will clamor for more depth. He skims rapidly over complex topics and (apart from glancing references to South Africa and Botswana) credits few positive developments.

But the dark history Meredith narrates is one that merits repetition. So many of the atrocities he writes of could have been curtailed if the world had paid more heed.

In that spirit, those who believe that knowledge is power might well agree that spending a few hours with a book like this makes at least as positive a contribution to the future of Africa as attending a concert.

News Digest

Bubbles

We've heard about all sorts of bubbles lately, from the dot.com bubble to the cheap oil bubble. Now from the U.S. comes talk of the middle age bubble. It refers, according to one report, to the "tens of millions of Americans crowded into the humorless years of child-rearing and moneymaking."

What a cheerless way to refer to the central part of most people's lives! The rise of the dot.coms and cheap oil were called bubbles because they inflate and then burst. I concede that quite a few of us get a bit inflated during those middle years, but not enough to burst.

But the percentage of those in the middle-aged category has never been higher in the U.S. – 30 percent. "No other age group is as mean spirited and unforgiving," states the article, "as the middle-aged as they steer children and teenagers through the treacherous channels of popular culture. No other age group is as materialistic and competitive as they engage in a deadly serious game of musical chairs for the prize of getting ahead."

The reason some 56 percent of people in the U.S. are dissatisfied with the way things are going in that country is due to the large number of bad-tempered middle-aged mamas and papas. Burdened with duties, this group has less time for sleep and for leisure, so they get in a foul mood and vote for a president who is also in a foul mood and itching for a fight.

Here are some further generalizations about this large (45-to-54-year-olds) age group: "The middle-aged are all work and no play. Their anger and frustration shout on talk radio. Their moral certitude lectures from the pulpits. The middle-age mindset explains political polarization and religious fervor. It is behind tax cuts, educational testing, mandatory sentencing, and tougher bankruptcy laws."

No doubt when these people reach my age, they will all mellow out and become much kinder, so we can look forward to a much friendlier America a decade from now.

Footprints

Archeologists in Mexico have discovered evidence that humans inhabited the Americas 25,000 years earlier than had been believed. Sylvia Gonzalez, one of the archeologists, who examined the footprints in volcanic ash, said: "The discovery of the footprints in Mexico is important because it shows that humanity's spread across the world was much faster than previously thought. What's more, this increased speed of migration shows that our ancestors adapted to new environments much quicker and more easily than we had imagined."

Before this discovery, the earliest dates for a human presence in the Americas was about 15,000 years ago.

But the experts didn't address the question whether they were arriving or leaving.

One article concludes: "Given that the new evidence proves they were there about 40,000 years ago, it is also now for the first time conceivable that humans entered the Americas even earlier, perhaps during a much warmer spell (a true interglacial period) about 70,000 years ago."

Another geochronologist (who knew there was such a science) took a close look at the footprints and said, "I've seen them up close and personal, and I don't think they are footprints."

Oops! Don't start rewriting the history books quite yet.

Bird news

Some good news. Birds may be becoming resistant to the West Nile virus say researchers. At least, it seems to be true in Alberta. There are no reports to that effect in New York, where West Nile began earlier. Maybe the birds in Alberta, like the people, are just much tougher than those in New York.

If the birds become immune and are taken out of the cycle, there will also be fewer infected mosquitoes. Good news for us; bad news for the makers of DEET.